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Chapter

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THE GROWTH OF LITERATURE AND
CRITICISM AT ROME

If the Greeks were first in Europe to create and record literature, to develop
literary genres and define their natures, and to evolve critical systems for
describing and prescribing forms of rhetoric and poetry, the Romans,
paradoxically, scored a different first. They were the first cultural community
to inherit literary models – those set up for them by the Greeks – before
they began to compose their own literature. It might be claimed that they
practised literary criticism, however rudimentary, before they practised
literature, for they were faced with questions of what to imitate and how. The
emergence of a relatively developed, highly imitative, national literature in
the third century BC has some analogies to the appearance of new criticism
and national literatures in the Renaissance; in both cases critical theory,
adapted from the prototype literature, helped to mould form and content and
in both cases formal education in grammar and rhetoric provided norms for
literary expression. But Renaissance writers in the vernacular had a richer
tradition of native poetry on which to draw than did the Romans, richer lexical
resources, and greater ambition for literary originality.

1 Livius Andronicus, Naevius, and Ennius

Of Rome's three earliest poets, two were professional teachers and both were
culturally as much Greek as Italian. The few relatively secure facts about
Livius Andronicus are representative of Rome's literary beginnings. He came
from Tarentum in Greek-speaking south Italy, which had been captured by
Roman forces between 280 and 275 BC. He probably knew little Latin when
he first came to Rome, but from time spent in instructing young Romans in
Greek acquired sufficient command of Latin to produce a translation of the
Odyssey, not into quantitive Greek hexameters, but into archaic, accentual
Saturnian verse. His text was probably intended for school use and remained
a school-text in Horace's youth, but it gave him the reputation to become the
first Latin playwright, when he was commissioned by the magistrates
supervising the Great Games of 240 BC to make translations of a Greek
tragedy and comedy for stage production. These unidentified plays are the

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landmark with which Cicero opens his account of Latin literature in the *Brutus* (72), our best source for the early phases of literature at Rome. A generation later, in 207 BC (Livy 27.37.7) as an old man he was invited to compose an original work, a hymn celebrating Roman successes in the war with Hannibal. In return he was honoured by the grant of membership to himself and his fellow poets in the guild of the professional clerks (*scribae*) in the temple of Aventine Diana. So Livius' first compositions in Latin were translations, and his professional livelihood the teaching of Greek poetry, to which Suetonius (*De grammaticis* 1), writing 350 years later, adds the reading and explanation of Latin poetry which he or his associates had composed. Both translating and teaching would direct emphasis to the actual language of composition; when plot and narrative sequence, character and dialogue are predetermined by the model, composition becomes very much a matter of choosing (or creating) the right word for the context. Hence Roman poetry began with concern for diction but with scope for linguistic creativity. The Roman inferiority complex in relation to Greek was compounded by the quest for dignity, and much Latin criticism would take the form of carping at single words thought unworthy of the writer's genre.

How did Livius and his successors teach poetry? The *praelectio* (*explication de texte*) was the *grammaticus'* stock in trade in the Roman Empire, and Suetonius assumes it was already practised by the first Roman *grammatici*. Since it was adapted from Hellenistic school practice it may have been fully developed when first introduced to Rome. The teacher would define the genre of the work, describe the poet's life and circumstances, and then analyse the form of the poem. Although serious analysis may only have been introduced to Rome by Crates of Mallos around 170 BC, we can assume Livius also pointed out the moral application of what was read and identified Greek deities and mythological figures; there is little reason to expect an evaluation of broader aesthetic elements than what was inherent in grammar, diction, and figures of speech.

Early Latin poetry – epic, drama, or hymn – was intended to be heard, not read. Even the dramatic scripts of Plautus, two generations after Livius, survived as property of theatre companies, and Ennius and Terence were the first poets whose texts were preserved for study. The Romans' own outline of their early literary history could not take shape until the scholarly researches of Aelius Stilo and his pupil Varro in the last century of the republic established a relatively firm chronology, and our chief source, Cicero, shows in the *Brutus* (72) that around 100 BC a serious student of Roman theatre production, the poet Accius, could be as much as two generations out in dating the first poets.

Naevius, Livius' successor, was more remarkable, because he did more than adapt Greek tragedy and comedy. He was an original composer of Roman tragedy and historical epic, the latter a heroic narrative of the first war with Carthage (in which he himself fought). But little of his work is

preserved, and apart from his alleged imprisonment for insulting a powerful family, the Metelli, we know virtually nothing of his personality and literary methods. Only with Quintus Ennius does a fully rounded man of letters emerge, though it is probably his versatility and popular success that eclipsed both Naevius and Livius before him.

In his great epic *Annales*, designed to follow the history of Rome from her foundation to the current warfare with Greece, Ennius asserted a new kind of status. No one, he declared (line 209 Skutsch), had been *dicti studiosus* before him. The phrase, in which *dicti* cannot be given any of its regular connotations, translates the Alexandrian value-word *philologus*, which lies halfway between scholar and critic and denotes a man with sufficient learning in language and literature to evaluate and give permanent form to the poetic text. Ennius is affirming his qualifications as a critic, though his greatest pride was as a *poeta* (*Satirae* 3 and p. 64 Vahlen). The Calabrian poet spoke three languages, Oscan from birth and Greek and Latin as languages of education. He declared that this gave him three personalities (Gellius 17.17.1). Finding the accentual Saturnian metres uncouth, 'verses once chanted by woodland sprites and bards' (207 Skutsch), he modified the Homeric hexameter to match the heavier rhythms of Latin. His standards were Greek, and he opened his poem, like Homer, with an appeal to the muses on Olympus, creating the symbolic fiction of a dream to match the dream of Hesiod, who met the muses on Helicon and was given water from the sacred spring Hippocrene. But there is no evidence that he simply copied Hesiod's dream and claimed his own encounter with the muses. Instead he reports (2 – 10 Skutsch) a vision of the poet Homer who explained that a single soul, after passing in Pythagorean metempsychosis through Homer into later men, was now possessed by Ennius himself: thus he was literally a second Homer, a critical claim that Roman nationalists would repeatedly adapt to other aspiring counterparts of the Greek poets.

Did Ennius' appeal to the muses and his vision come from the influence of Callimachus' famous poem, the *Aetia*? We should be cautious about going beyond the fragmentary excerpts in order to match Ennius with the Callimachean poetic baptism, but Ennius' claim to inherit Homer's soul may be a device to escape Callimachus' reproach against mere imitators of Homer.[1] He had extensive knowledge of Hellenistic works, for he composed poems based on writings by Euhemerus, Epicharmus, Archestratus, and others. Surely, then, he also knew the great Alexandrian, and was writing in reaction to him. Certainly, the translator of Euhemerus will not have recorded Roman history in a spirit of simple faith, and Ennius probably belittled Naevius as much for his literal narrative as for his Archaic verse-form and diction. As protégé of Rome's élite – first Cato, then Scipio Africanus,

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[1] Skutsch, *Annals*, p. 148.

later Fulvius Nobilior, the learned dedicator of a shrine to the muses – Ennius lived by his Hellenism: Suetonius includes him with Livius as one who taught as a *grammaticus* and explicated Greek poetry. But Cicero, who read them both, claims (*Brutus* 76) that he owed much to Naevius and passed over the first war with Carthage because Naevius had reported it. Taking the two statements together we would guess borrowing of diction rather than content, but the forty-odd lines left of Naevius' epic do not permit comparison.

We may blame Ennius and Naevius for squeezing contemporary history into epic and tragic form with the hazards of incongruity commonly recognised in, say, Cicero's epic poem *On his Consulate*. But Ennius' Council of the Gods before the apotheosis of Romulus (53–4 Skutsch), his personification of Discord flinging open the Gates of War (225–6), and his application of Homeric imagery to contemporary commanders show that a Latin writer could achieve epic sublimity: such passages as the dream of Ilia (34–50) or the silence of the people of Rome awaiting the competitive auspices of Romulus and Remus (72–91) provided generations of Roman historians and poets with language that added emotional depth to their texts through its allusive resonance. In this, Ennius long remained for Roman writers what Homer never ceased to be for the Greeks, and 600 years later the critics Macrobius and Servius would use a knowledge of Ennius, however derivative and fragmentary, to interpret Virgil's greater epic. Cicero's judgement of Ennius' relationship to Naevius as either debt or theft (*Brutus* 76), will be repeated by less perceptive critics. But Roman literature was built on conscious and acknowledged imitation. Beginning with the transfer of thought from Greek to Latin it progressed (with Ennius) to the transfer of techniques to report new content and (with Plautus, Ennius' older contemporary) to the reclothing of Greek content in a freer and more travestied verbal wardrobe.

2 Plautus and Terence

As the dramatic *ludi* (festivals) increased in popularity, audiences now attended several adapted Greek tragedies and comedies each year. The reflection of their tastes in Plautus' versions of Greek comedy suggests no critical demands beyond simple pleasure in humour and violence, and an elementary desire to see villains punished, young lovers forgiven, and social values reconciled. The two Plautine comedies that make least compromise with popular taste also have programmatic prologues. *Captivi (Prisoners)* presents the edifying tale of a slave prisoner of war sacrificing himself to win his master's freedom and rewarded by the recognition of citizen status. Plautus asks for approval because the play is not on a hackneyed theme: 'it has no foulmouthed verses unfit to quote, no dishonest pander or naughty courtesan or boastful soldier'. What is offered for popular appeal is the theme of disguise and deception and a guarantee of a happy ending. Many Romans were

captured and ransomed during the wars of this period (*c.* 210 – 185 BC) and the subject may have been welcome for this reason. It is harder to see how Plautus made a popular success of *Trinummus* (*Three-bit Trickster*) which opens with a unique moral allegory: the prologue is spoken by Luxury to her daughter Poverty, announcing the imminent ruin of a young spendthrift. It is also unusual in refusing any hint of the action to come. What is exceptional in Plautine comedy will not become regular practice until he is succeeded by a more sophisticated writer.

For our purposes the chief significance of Plautine comedy is in demonstrating how far a 'translator' can go in changing the form and content of his model. This is the first explosion of linguistic virtuosity in Roman literature, and Plautus' cavalier liberties taken with dramatic structure and characterisation are offset by the versatility of his lyric and dialogue metres and by every kind of play on sound and sense in extravagantly stylised verbal fantasy. Translation as imitation has been superseded by exploitation of the model as vehicle for the Roman poet's personal idiom.

For several generations the verbal pyrotechnics of Plautus blinded Roman scholars to his carelessness as a playwright, so that Varro repeated his master Aelius Stilo's claim that if the muses had spoken Latin they would have spoken the language of Plautus (Quint. 10.1.99). But it would not be fanciful to read implied criticism of Plautus into the polemical prologues of Terence, which offer the first body of systematic dramatic criticism in Latin. Terence's premature attempt to refine Roman taste must be seen as the product of extraordinary circumstances. How did a nineteen-year-old of Carthaginian or African origin come to fuse two similar plays by the Greek Menander (*Andrian Girl* and *Perinthian Girl*) into one classically elegant Roman piece? We are told in the Life by Suetonius[2] that he was the slave of a Roman senator, won the friendship of the younger Scipio (Aemilianus, *doyen* of Roman culture in the next generation), and died at the age of twenty-five on a trip to Greece in search of more Menandrian scripts to translate. His achievements and associates can only be explained if he was educated with these or comparable Roman nobles. The rhetorical accomplishment of Terence's prologues points to a training alongside future politicians whose careers he might also be expected to serve, and the expulsion of Greek rhetoricians and philosophers from Rome in 161 BC[3] suggests that Greeks had probably been teaching or serving as private tutors at the city of opportunity since the first Macedonian war. Only bilingual education and rhetorical training could explain Terence's fastidious language and standards of dramatic decorum, ideals he could practise but not preach without overt criticism of old favourites

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[2] The 'Life of Terence' found with Donatus' commentary on the plays is generally believed to be abridged from Suetonius' *De poetis*, to which we also owe lives of Virgil, Horace, Lucan, and others.

[3] Kennedy, *Art of Rhetoric*, pp. 151 – 3.

like Plautus that would be unacceptable from an upstart foreigner. Instead, Terence exploited a man of straw, the obscure Luscius of Lanuvium, whose jealous attacks on his rival's scripts justified Terence in composing polemical prologues to articulate his principles. This introduction of the voice of the dramatist into a play, commenting on his own work, has its chief precedent in the *parabasis* of Old Comedy.

We do not find in Terence explicit claims for the superiority of one type of comedy over another, or appeals to propriety. He had to disguise his beliefs and provide diplomatic reasons for his procedure. None of his prologues forecasts the course of the dramatic action or identifies the mysterious heroine, but in the prologue to *Andria* he treats such revelations as the proper purpose of prologues, which he has had to sacrifice in order to defend himself against unfair criticism. In this first play he departed from convention in three ways: by blending elements from a second play, *Perinthia*, into his main model; by replacing the wife of the borrowed exposition scene by an invented role – the trusty freedman Sosia – and by introducing into the action a subordinate plot based on a second master-and-slave pair. The last change was most extensive, entailing patchwork reconstruction at the beginning of two acts and the end of two others, but he is silent about this, as he is about suppressing the wife. We owe our knowledge to the commentator Donatus. In the prologue Terence stresses the first change, claiming his enemies accused him of 'contaminating' the Greek plays (like adulterating wines) whereas he is following the inspired creative licence of Naevius, Plautus, and Ennius, models more worthy of imitation than his pedantic rivals. *Contaminatio* seemed a threat to dramatists in that it 'spoiled' two Greek originals for Latin adaptation, a measure of the deep-seated feeling that action and character could only be found in the Greek versions. In this and other prologues Terence appeals to the audience over the heads of his rivals, affirming the freshness of his comedies. He did not change his practice: his two most successful comedies, *Eunuchus* and *Adelphoe*, are also based on more than one model, and the latter actually imports material from a different playwright. The secondary model, Diphilus' *Synapothneskontes*, had already been adapted for the Roman stage by Plautus, which laid Terence open to the charge of plagiarism, but he can deny it because Plautus had omitted the one scene he took over.

The terms of production seem to have required that a play be *novus*, not previously adapted; it is less clear whether the term *integer*, 'fresh' or 'unused', has the same meaning in the prologue to *Heautontimoroumenos* (*Self-Tormentor*). Both the Greek and Roman plays are called *integer*, probably in a different sense; the Greek is 'not previously adapted', the Terentian script is 'complete', 'unmodified'. This prologue adds to the issue of originality a question of comic standards, the basic conflict between high comedy and farce. Terence's chief actor, who speaks the prologue, calls the play 'static' and praises its refined language. He makes a pretext of his advanced age to justify the quiet type

of action: 'give me permission to put across a quiet comedy in silence, so that we don't always have to have a Running Slave, an Angry Old Man, a Greedy Parasite, an Impudent Sycophant, a Miserly Pander – all acted with the greatest noise and the maximum effort' (35 – 40). Terence deprecates the standard comic roles because his own interest lay in the subtle psychology of well-bred citizens. Before the *Self-Tormentor* he had already produced a family-based play, *Hecyra* ('Mother-in-Law'), which failed to get a hearing, and the absence of a Terentian production in the following year suggests that the quiet *Self-Tormentor* was also a failure. His next plays stressed low-life roles, importing action scenes and earthy humour, as in *Eunuch* with its boastful parasite, its mock siege, and its titillating rape-narrative.

What other literary principles or tastes emerge from his appeals to the public? His criticism of his opponent's plays singles out three episodes, criticising two in terms of decorum. In one play Luscius had made the crowd give way to a slave as he ran on with urgent news. Terence sees it as quite wrong that the crowd 'should play slave to the crazy fellow' (*Self-Tormentor* 6 – 10). In another play Luscius had presented his young hero hallucinating that a stag chased by hounds was crying to him for help: the extravagant paratragic behaviour offends Terence (*Phormio* 6 – 10). The third play reveals a conflict between the needs of drama and legal convention. In the arbitration scene of *The Treasure* Luscius had made his defendant speak before the adversary suing him. This might be incorrect procedure, but it was dramatically more effective that the successful party speak last, and doubtless Luscius was keeping the order of his Greek models. (The reversal of order had already been used by Euripides, *Trojan Woman*, 895 – 1059.) What these criticisms show is that verisimilitude and social decorum were recognised as dramatic issues, distinguishing high comedy from farce. Not only Luscius, but Plautus and those Terence professed to respect would have been liable to the same reproach.

Terence is important to the history of Latin because, though writing in verse, he created the language of artistic prose, contributing as much to future oratory and prose dialogue as to drama itself. His fastidious exclusion not only of extravagance and vulgarity, but even of everyday allusions to food and furnishings (in this contrasting with Menander) drained the colour from comedy but produced an idiom flexible and elliptic. From a narrow lexical base he gave Latin both *sermo*, informal conversation, and *contentio*, discourse streamlined for swift and forceful argument. This achievement was supported by the work of two very different men of letters, the elder Cato – orator, politician, and historian – and Lucilius, the gentleman satirist. Cato was nearly seventy when Terence died: his oratory ranges from broad prolix deliberative speaking to pungent personal invective rich in irony and humour and figures of thought.[4] He asserted the dignity of Latin as a medium for

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[4] What remain of Cato's speeches are collected in Enrica Malcovati (ed.), *Oratorum Romanorum fragmenta* (2nd ed., Pavia, 1955), pp. 12 – 97.

national history and mocked a younger contemporary, Postumius Albinus, for writing history in Greek and apologising for his inadequate command of the language (Gellius 11.8.2).

3 Lucilius

Lucilius, a generation younger than Terence, is familiar with Greek rhetorical terms, and uses them to tease Hellenophiles like Titus Albucius for their affected concern with rhythm and artificial word order: 'how daintily his diction is artfully arrayed, like mosaic cubes in an inlaid floor!' (fr. 84–5 Krenkel). Lucilius mocks himself (fr. 184) for an involuntary rhymed ending in the fashion of Isocrates, finding the homoeoteleuton hollow and adolescent (*meiraciodes*). In sharp contrast, he writes seriously on matters of grammar and orthography and takes time to distinguish the concepts of *poema* and *poesis*: the latter, like the *Iliad* or Ennius' *Annals*, is a unity in theme (*thesis*) and form (*epos*) (fr. 376–85). Criticism of Homer, he says, will not be of the whole poem, but of one verse or phrase or argument or passage. Here, however, he is not concerned so much with literary criticism as with determining the text: his verb *culpare* corresponds to the Alexandrian *stigma* placed against lines of a passage deemed spurious. Along with this concern for purging the text, Lucilius shows the traditional veneration for the 'real' authors. Roman respect for the past quickly turned revered poets into *auctores*, 'authorities', whose diction was a model for the next generation and who could be held up as a reproach against attempts at new styles and standards by younger poets, just as followers of Varro angered Horace by their preference for the dead primitives over the living innovators. As a medium for reflection on personal experience or moral and social issues, Lucilius' verse carried further the range of colloquial Latin. Thus by the end of the second century Roman culture had moved beyond the primitive nobility of Ennius and early tragedy, and the uninhibited peasant vigour of Plautine comedy. Greek rhetoricians and philosophers were there to stay, and the intellectuals around Scipio Aemilianus or the Gracchi, educated in Hellenistic ideas and techniques of expression, were transplanting into Latin new genres of prose like the dialogues on jurisprudence of Junius Brutus (Cic., *De or.* 2.224) and history and biography.

4 Rhetoric at Rome

Latin literature was pragmatic: what philologists call *Gebrauchsliteratur*. As the first century began, poetry was either an increasingly politicised tragedy or the leisure occupation of the aristocrat, a form of exercise for the wits. Plutarch (*Lucullus* 1.5) illustrates Lucullus' love of literature (*philologia*) with the story that he, the orator Hortensius, and the historian Sisenna tossed dice to see who should record the Marsic War in Latin verse, who in Greek prose, and

who in Greek verse. The first works of literary criticism at Rome would have to emerge from rhetoric, the art of words applied to the purposes of the forum, and rhetoric itself would have to escape from the dominance of the most recent utilitarian contribution to the art – the *stasis* theory of Hermagoras of Temnos, with its programmed analysis of a legal situation so as to choose the appropriate defence and draw on the full range of favourable arguments to fit the case.

The earliest complete work of rhetorical theory at Rome is based on this system, and although medieval writers would find guidance for composing narrative verse and prose from its discussion of *narratio* and outlines of circumstantial sources of argument, none of its instruction is based on literary values. Had Cicero continued his youthful *De inventione* to include the theory of expression (*elocutio*) like the contemporary author of the anonymous *Rhetoric for Herennius*, we might have had a better picture of the aesthetic standards of the 80s BC. As it is, the author of *Ad Herennium* presents in Latin a code of styles and a classification of ornament which originated in Greek. Its most distinctive feature, not repeated in later rhetorical manuals, is its parade of models for the three recognised styles of discourse, the grand style, the middle or mixed style, and the plain, with parallel samples of unsuccessful passages in each idiom. We meet a recognisable heir to Terence in the vivid and swift plain narrative, with excerpts of conversation (4.14), and two excerpts from formal speeches, a grand denunciation from the peroration of a political prosecution (4.12) and a defence counsel's reasoned analysis of the motives of a rebellious colony in the calmer, symmetrical, middle style (4.13). The tone of the last is conciliatory, whereas the grand passage aims to fan the emotions, a contrast that Cicero will later identify and formalise. *Artes poetriae* of the Middle Ages, such as those by Geoffrey of Vinsauf, John of Garland, and Matthew of Vendome, will apply the three-style system to new definitions of narrative genres, in which grand, middle, and plain will be seen as the modes for narrative about the court, the town, and the world of shepherds and peasants. But for this to evolve the three styles had to pass through further modifications and applications by Varronian and post-Virgilian criticism.

Both Cicero's *De inventione* and the manual for Herennius come closest to concern with creative literature when they discuss types of narrative (*De inventione* 1.27; *Ad Herennium* 1.13f.): both quote the Hellenistic tripartite division of subject matter based on the two polarities of fact versus fiction and realism versus fantasy. Thus events neither true nor probable are seen as the material of tragedy (*fabula*), events imaginary yet probable are assigned to comedy (*argumentum*), and events which did take place, but at a time remote from the recollection of our age provide the subject of historical writing (*historia*). Concern with vividness and psychological interest in narrative, as with the variety and excitement produced by 'reversals of fortune, unexpected disaster, sudden joy' (*Ad Herennium* 1.13) show how aspects of tragedy

singled out by Aristotle's *Poetics* were adopted by Hellenistic historians in the service of romanticising history. Polybius, the most scientific of the Hellenistic historians, lived at Rome for a generation under the patronage of Aemilianus, and (e.g., 12.25) denounced (but sometimes practised) the dramatisation of history. His influence will be apparent two generations later in Cicero's distinction between the required features of continuous history and of the more rhetorical monograph.

The Roman nobility was a governing class which subordinated both education and cultured leisure to the interest of the state or more often of their own political careers. They embraced the applied art of rhetoric, but were indifferent to its epideictic or ceremonial branch, from which Greece had developed the taste for artistic prose, rich in rhythm and evocative imagery. In the quarrel between rhetoric and philosophy in the time of Plato and Isocrates, the philosophers' fundamental objection had been the indifference of rhetoric to the truth, whether known or unknown, and its substitution of emotional pressure for argument. Isocratean teaching had stressed moral context, but was essentially an art of embellishment, not of reasoning. Aristotle and his successors, whether Peripatetic or Stoic, developed the topics – categories of reasoning – and established a complete system of argumentation. Cicero, with the advantage of training in both the Academic and Stoic systems, could improve the quality of oratory, but lacked the intellectual tools for a critical study of imaginative literature such as epic or tragedy. Stylistic and structural analysis would not suffice, since perceptive criticism should also concern itself with the author's choice of theme and event, and with his handling of psychology and ethics – largely the domain of the ancient philosopher. This was the gap that even the highly educated Cicero would have had to leap if he consciously sought to be a literary critic, but the Romans did not have such a profession. Even the Alexandrian *kritikos* was more editor than critic; his primary job was to examine a text as a Roman censor would the citizen body, expelling what was unworthy. The criterion was one of technical authenticity, and we can see how Cicero exploits this expectation to mock his enemy Piso Caesoninus, when Piso condemned Cicero's verse *cedant arma togae*, 'Let warfare give way to words'. 'Surely', he asks the audience, 'this is not an Aristarchus, but a Phalaris to mark a verse for excision because he doesn't like its subject matter?' (*In Pisonem* 73)

Piso was unusual in his deep interest in philosophy and poetry; usually Cicero had to adjust his words in the senate or forum to conciliate a philistine public. He need not conceal his knowledge of Roman law, but he had to play down his training in ethics and dialectic with the Academician Philo and the Stoic Diodotus, as he had to play down his love of poetry. We get a fair picture of public taste from his speech *For Archias* (62 BC), defending the claim to citizenship of a Greek poet. Archias himself illustrates what the Romans of the mid first century expected of poetry. From Antioch in Syria he had come

to Italy, supporting himself by poetry and perhaps teaching in the Greek cities
of Campania. He won the patronage of the Luculli and Lutatius Catulus the
younger and was taken abroad by them to commemorate their campaigns in
verse. Poets, as Cicero pointed out, are necessary if our deeds are to be
immortalised. In society Archias could extemporise with amazing fluency on
any topic, changing the metre or treatment of the theme to produce a second
or third versification of the same material. Here is the dichotomy between
occasional epigram and military epic which we noted earlier. And although
Cicero does not say so, these poems were in Greek. Cicero's speech associates
the pursuit of poetry with *humanitas* and *doctrina*: the former assimilates it to
morality and good breeding, the latter to knowledge, as if poetry were an
educational tool. When he surveys what poetry has to offer society, Cicero
begins with its power to enrich public oratory, then moves to its service as
relaxation after the serious business of life. But its greatest service is to inspire
men to heroic achievement, providing them with models of behaviour, and
preserving the memory of great deeds in history which would otherwise be
neglected and forgotten. In this way poetry offers men personal survival in
a verbal likeness comparable to honorific statues, and it celebrates national
achievements. Cicero's antithesis of utility and pleasure (*For Archias* 16)
anticipates Horace's prescription that 'poetry scores highest when it mixes
utility and sweetness' (*AP* 343). Thus poetry is justified by its moral benefits,
and the poet is recognised as a useful member of society. Cicero is modelling
his portrait of the poet on Ennius, and cites him as authority for the most
extravagant claim, that poets are specially inspired, privileged by the gods
and so *sancti poetae*. This is a far cry from the technical versatility of a
professional versifier like Archias. But we cannot blame Cicero's utilitarian
approach entirely on his audience, since he himself used poetry for relaxation,
translating Aratus' astronomical poems from the Greek, and for political self-
advertisement, when he composed a three-book epic on his consulship.

5 Cicero's dialogue 'On the Orator'

The culture of Cicero's generation would have been impossible without
ownership of, or access to, libraries. Scipio Aemilianus, a century earlier, was
probably unique among his generation in enjoying a private library – his
share of his father Aemilius Paullus' spoils from the palace of the defeated
Perseus of Macedon. Sulla exercised the same right of conquest after the siege
of Athens in 85 BC, acquiring from the wealthy Andronicus the esoteric library
of the Aristotelian school containing Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and other major works.
This library then passed into the hands of Cicero's friend Faustus Sulla. The
nucleus of Cicero's own collection came more conventionally by gift from his
friend Papirius Paetus, whose cousin, the grammarian Servius Clodius, died
in Athens leaving a Greek and Latin collection. Cicero's letters of 60 BC show

him negotiating with Atticus to have the collection shipped back to Rome. Thus in his first mature work of literary and rhetorical theory, *De oratore* (55 BC), he could draw on his own resources and the library of Faustus. More important, he was on good terms with the Greek scholar-grammarian Tyrannio of Amisos, who was then editing the texts of the Aristotelian library for Faustus. This is one reason why we should not doubt that Cicero drew for the composition of *De oratore* on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*; the other is the close coincidence of his theory of invention with the system of Aristotle's first two books (his speaker Antonius claims to have read rhetorical works by the philosopher) and further affinities between Cicero's treatment of tropes in Book III with Aristotle's discussion in the third book of the *Rhetoric*.

Vitruvius (9. pr. 17), writing in the Augustan age, includes *De oratore* with Lucretius' *De rerum natura* and Varro's *De Lingua Latina*, as one of the three learned monuments of the previous generation. The work reflects Cicero's lifelong concern to defend rhetoric against the criticism of philosophy, especially the moral and epistemological criticisms of Plato's *Gorgias* and Plato's appeal for a new philosophical rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*. Both Isocrates and Aristotle had tried to meet this challenge, and Cicero draws on their separate traditions, relying on Isocrates for the pedagogic and stylistic theories of the first two books[5] and on Aristotle for the theory of invention and expression. But the work is more than a synthesis of the Greek traditions. Cicero's own interest as an artist drove him to explore every aspect of personal style: its growth, its adaptation to context, and its relation to the evolving styles of different generations of oratory. Throughout his argument he recognises that the orator *qua* performer is an actor, but *qua* composer is closer to the poet. Hence his analogy (1.69) to the metaphrastic poets Aratus, writing on astronomy, or Nicander on snakebites, because they present other men's material in verse as the orator must do in prose. Yet he recognises the different licence of the poet and orator in the use of language; the poet is more restricted in rhythm but correspondingly freer in vocabulary and phraseology.

A recurring theme in *De oratore* is personal idiom. The Isocratean tradition taught by model passages and claimed that the best student was the one who came closest to the model (*Against the Sophists* 18). How could the young writer achieve his own style while copying the admired teacher? Cicero points to the need to choose a teacher suited to the pupil's natural talents and represents the pupil's mature work as a fusion of his own idiom and that of the model (2.89–90). In the third book (19–35), when form becomes the dominant issue, Cicero begins by affirming two principles which are as much literary as rhetorical: the first is that style and sense, form and content, must be matched so that ideal form gives brilliance to significant content. The second

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[5] The treatment of natural ability, exercise, and imitation up to 2.98. The discussion of rhythm (3.171–98) blends Isocratean with Aristotelian theory.

principle is respect for diversity, for the difference of idiom between Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides within the spectrum of tragedy, or for the distinct idiom of orators trained in the same generation by the same teacher, whose differing personalities shape their discourse. In this important section Cicero treats oratory simply as one of several literary genres and takes as his starting point the whole field of literature.

Cicero's adaptation (2.115) of the three Aristotelian modes of rhetorical proof stresses means of persuasion: the logical or quasi-logical proof, the power to move pity or anger, and the art of winning over the audience by a congenial self-portrayal. In his modification of the formula in *Orator* (69), written ten years later, the substitution of the art of pleasing (*delectare*) for the art of winning over reflects his growing interest in the aesthetic aspects of discourse. Perhaps too he felt that for the Roman advocate, who defended his client in person rather than ghost-writing a speech, the psychological techniques of conciliating the audience were not essentially different from the emotional mode of proof, and that Aristotle had not taken into account the power of charm, wit, and imagination to beguile the public. Roman rhetorical theory had been slow to adapt itself to the more varied opportunities for ethos and pathos offered by the Roman courts, but Cicero's speeches show him fully exploiting them.[6]

As a legacy of his concern with the orator as performer, Cicero often measures style by its effect on the ear, yet whatever he has to say about the expectations of the listener is valid in appreciating literature read in silence today. The reader is affected by the same perception of rhythm, diction, imagery, and verbal music as the ancient listener, although his reaction may be weaker. Cicero was acutely aware of audience reaction, and the orator's need to improvise or modify his text in response, but he cared even more for the higher standards which only written preparation of the speech could achieve, and his recommendations for control of expression mix what we might see as aesthetic criteria with the rhetorician's focus on persuasion. One particularly important passage (*De or.* 3.96–101) defines *ornatus* as something organic rather than superficially applied. The text is a body that must be well-proportioned. Whether taken from the human body or its sculptured likeness, the analogy is visual, and Cicero declares that dignity, charm, culture, breeding, refinement, and emotional depth are manifest not in the individual limbs, but in the body as an organic whole. Local or applied ornament makes its effect by contrast and should not be sprinkled throughout the text but spaced at calculated intervals, like ornamental motifs in a public display. This Isocratean principle of *kosmos* (both ornament and harmonious ordering) is reinforced by analogies from other senses and arts. The audience should be charmed without surfeit, just as sober old-fashioned paintings with simple

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[6] George Kennedy, 'The rhetoric of advocacy in Greece and Rome', *AJP*, 89 (1968), 419–34.

colouring appeal to us longer than modern works loaded with cloying and brilliant colour. From painting, from music, from perfumery and cookery, Cicero argues the counterproductive effect of excessive sweetness or ornament too prominently patterned and unrelieved. In poetry or prose, he insists, contrast is essential. It is all the more necessary because writing, unlike painting, occupies not just the ears (we would say eyes) but the mind, and false flourishes are quickly spotted. Just as the speaker's delivery should rise and fall in volume, pitch, and stress, so the writer must vary the intensity of his diction. This amazingly synaesthetic paragraph, which may well go back to a Hellenistic source, perhaps Theophrastus' *Peri lexeōs*, points to the twin criteria of taste: discretion and variety in the successful work of art.

A Greek origin for Cicero's argument is suggested by its interest in visual analogy. Cicero knew Greek art, but is more likely to have drawn the principles from his studies of Greek rhetoric than from the examples of music, painting or sculpture. Since he uses the fourfold analysis of the 'virtues' of style attributed to Theophrastus throughout the third book of *De oratore* (36 – 212) and explicitly later in the *Orator* (79), it is possible that this illustrative material also comes from Theophrastus. When he considers added ornament based on word selection and arrangement, and the tropes and figures, Cicero seems close to Aristotle's analysis. Both in *Poetics* 22 (1458b17f.) and *Rhetoric* 3.2 (1404b5f.) Aristotle had classified words into basic vocabulary ('proper' words) and three deviations: exotic or archaic (*glossai*), compound words, and coinages. These three categories gave poetry elevation appropriate to its inspired effect, but in prose only metaphor was an admissible variation on the dignity of basic vocabulary, giving speech novelty (what Aristotle calls *to xenon*, 'exoticness') without affectation. For metaphor uses basic vocabulary in a strikingly new context. Cicero echoes Aristotle's interpretation of the psychology of metaphor. As in the *Rhetoric*, the pleasure received from imagery is partly stimulus to the imagination, challenged to note a resemblance between one sphere and another, and partly the release of mental travel from the continuing theme to a different field. 'The listener without actually straying, is led in his thought in a new direction – and this is a source of the greatest pleasure ... every apt metaphor is directed to the senses, particularly that of the sight, the keenest of all' (3.160). He notes images drawn from the other senses, but singles out the visual images because 'they almost place within the mind's eye things that we cannot see and perceive in fact ... the single word that contains the likeness will bring the brilliance of metaphor to the language' (3.161).

We may contrast Cicero's impatient dismissal of the figures of speech that depend on repetition and arrangement, and even of the figures of thought by which we vary syntax to avoid the monotony of continuous statement. These were the staple of traditional rhetoric and the *Rhetoric for Herennius*, Book IV, does not go beyond them to consider the problem of consistency and

harmony of style. Although Cicero alludes to the three-style system of the manual (*De or.* 3.177, 3.199, 3.212) he prefers to stress the infinite gradations of idiom from person to person. His aesthetic sense strides ahead of his analytical vocabulary, but even the relatively rough account of prose rhythm (3.171 – 98) pays the same attention to the need for variety of phrase length and the hasards of too obtrusive symmetry in the so-called Gorgianic figures which Isocrates perpetuated. Here again Cicero insists on the primacy of thought. Rhythm should seem a spontaneous by-product of meaning, and the architecturally admirable periodic sentence, first rousing then satisfying suspense, should be varied by shorter sense-units, just as prose should not reiterate rhythmic patterns like actual verse. At the centre of his discussion of rhythm is a teleological section comparing the written or spoken word to an organism or artistic construct. Cicero argues that like the heavenly bodies in orbit, like trees or ships or even temples, the ideal discourse will derive its beauty from the very features introduced of necessity or for convenience: meaning and the need of speech for breath determines the proportion of units within the sentence and the length of the whole. Here again he may be drawing on Theophrastus.

Columns and porticoes serve to support temples, but they are as imposing as they are functional. It was not beauty but necessity that designed the gable-end of the Capitoline temple and others too, for in devising a means to drain water from the roof to either side, the magnificence of the gable followed from the temple's requirements, so that even if the Capitol were to be set up in heaven, where there is no rain, it would have seemed undignified without its gable ... this happens in the same way in all the parts of a speech.   (3.180)

To raise aesthetic demands in this way when considering the oratory of the senate house and forum shows how far Cicero had taken over the values of epideictic discourse into the practical genres. But *De oratore* itself embodies an entirely new standard of artistry, not only in its style, varying easily between conversation and forceful argument, but in its proportions and elaborate structure, held together by thematic imagery, cross-reference, and dramatic form. A composition designed on this scale is the product of increased familiarity with Hellenistic technological writings, and of training in dialectic, in arguing both sides of the case and synthesising conclusions.[7] The quality of organisation in the prose writings of Cicero's generation will be lost in the next century under the negative influence of declamation, with its cult of the momentary aphorism.

Both by its precepts and its example *De oratore* ensured that artistry was now expected from prose, and Cicero makes a special digression (2.51 – 64) to give recommendations for a different kind of prose: historical writing,

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[7] Elizabeth Rawson, 'The introduction of logical organisation in Roman prose literature', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 46 (1978), 12 – 34.

intended to be read, not declaimed, a genre in which practice at Rome had proceeded without sufficient concern for scientific or artistic principles. It is useful to measure his judgement of open-ended historical writing in *De oratore* against the nearly contemporary letter to the historian Lucceius requesting special treatment in a historical monograph. The discussion in *De oratore* approaches history as a species of epideictic and is more concerned with its form than its content: thus the early Roman chroniclers are compared unfavourably with the great writers of Greek history, not for their intellectual limitations but for their baldness, while the work of each Greek historian is given its *character* (stylistic portrait). Although Cicero admits the requirements of accuracy (the truth and nothing but the truth like a witness in court, 2.62), freedom from bias, background knowledge of the places and persons to be described, and scientific analysis of causality, Cicero's prime concern is stylistic: the need for a flowing and varied discourse precedes and follows his recommendations for the treatment of history itself. But his recognition of the appropriate, even, forward-flowing style for historical writing, distinct from the sharper idiom of the forum, opened up the way for *belles lettres*, treatises, dialogues, essays, and epistles in prose.

While *De oratore* focuses on continuous history, the letter to Lucceius (*Ad familiares* 5.12) addresses an annalistic historian and tries to divert him into the rhetorically freer world of the monograph. The criteria of drama and encomium are mingled in Cicero's vision of the projected separate work which he compares to a play: Rome was the originator of the *fabula praetexta*, historical drama in verse centred on a national hero, and this form provided another precedent for the monograph. Cicero points to the self-contained unit created by his consulate, exile, and recall, to its variety, its scope for moral judgements, and the appeal of 'a fine man's vicissitudes offering wonder, suspense, joy, distress, hope and apprehension' (5.12.5). Setting aside the historical precedents, we see here the same elements commended in the rhetorical manuals' prescription for narrative. But clearly Cicero knows the difference between imaginative encomium and veracious historical record. The charm and the power to immortalise which he predicates of this imagined work are the attributes of poetry, as his comparison with Homer's service to Achilles, found here and in *Pro Archia*, shows beyond doubt.

6 Cicero's 'Brutus' and 'Orator'

Despite its primary concern with education, *De oratore* reflects principles of genre-criticism and aesthetics, and in its surveys of Greek oratory and historiography show a grasp of the evolution of literary forms. But in the second phase of his rhetorical works, during his withdrawal from public life under the domination of Julius Caesar (48 – 44 BC), Cicero re-examined his assumptions to answer the challenge of changing tastes in the younger

generation. If practice comes before theory in rhetoric (as Cicero declared
in *De oratore* 1.88f.), then his own speeches and *De oratore* exhibit standards
which he only systematised when he was provoked to defend them. M. Junius
Brutus, the future assassin of Caesar, was not himself an 'Atticist', advocating
imitation of the chaste simplicity of early Athenian oratory, like his friend
Calvus, but he was a purist, morally austere and deprecating either pomp
or charm in oratory. The two works dedicated to Brutus in 46 BC, *Brutus*,
'On distinguished orators', and *Orator*, 'On the best style of discourse',
apply Cicero's critical ideals first descriptively to literary history, then
prescriptively as he reconciles conflicting approaches to personal style
and shows how all levels of style can and must be combined in the supremely
gifted speaker. If *Brutus* is more concerned with performance than com-
position, including the gesture and delivery of orators of Cicero's day,
yet the work is based on a new sense of the evolution of literature at Rome.
The chronological work of his friend Atticus, like the contemporary researches
of Varro and Cornelius Nepos, gave the perspective and framework to
measure Roman progress against that of Greece. Comparative criticism
is Cicero's chief tool in the *Brutus*: comparison of Roman with Greek,
in a spirit of emulation which we also see in Nepos' extant lives; comparison
of each new generation at Rome with its predecessors; and repeated contrasts
between the orators representing the grand and the plain style in each
generation. We should add comparison between the rise to technical perfection
of oratory (embodied with more truth than modesty in Cicero himself)
and the evolution of painting and sculpture. Cicero almost certainly adopted
ready-made from Greek criticism the canons of artists representing the
birth, growth, and acme of each art, but applies them effectively in vindicating
the present achievement of Roman oratory by comparison with the early
primitives. When he wrote this dialogue, oratory was already politically
endangered, and it is possible to see the entire work as an obituary for
his own art, but it is not until after Caesar's death, when he composes
the *Tusculans*, that Cicero will describe oratory as 'sinking into senility
and soon to pass away' (2.5).

Cicero's history of his own genre falls short of what we might expect in
a history of tragedy or the novel because development can be limited largely
to style and sentence structure. There is no evolution of the form, such as
Aristotle perceived when the second actor was introduced into tragedy, or
even of content, such as can be marked in the rise of the 'recognition' play,
or the change from naturalistic to formal Euripidean prologue. Alert to the
social and political conditions that stimulated oratory, Cicero nonetheless
marks growth by noting increasing command of the medium of discourse:
Isocrates is a great figure because he perceived and taught the need for rhythm,
periodic structure, and attention to the hearer's rhythmic expectations.
When Cicero comments on other genres in the introduction to *De finibus*

and (if it is a genuine work)[8] in *De optimo genere oratorum*, it is still a competition between Greek originals and their Roman adaptations: a Roman content to read Ennius and Accius is depicted as reluctant to read Latin versions of philosophical works or Greek oratory. Rome did not have the creative writers to stimulate criticism, and Cicero can record the early history of epic, comedy, and tragedy in the *Brutus* without asking why Terence had no successor, nor Ennius, nor even Accius, who died in Cicero's youth.

The best poetry of Cicero's day was esoteric: Catullus writing for his refined smart set, whom Cicero (*Tusculans* 3.45) called 'Chanters of Euphorion' (a sort of Hellenistic Swinburne, now lost) and scolded for their disrespect towards Ennius, or again Lucretius' solitary poem, mentioned by no contemporaries except in a private letter from Cicero to his brother who had apparently passed on the text for comment. Cicero finds it has 'many strokes of natural inspiration, but also quite a few technical successes' (*Ad Quintum* 2.9.3). Drama had been a popular art, drawing on audiences like that of oratory, and Cicero recognises the different public of non-dramatic poetry in a passage discussing the response of the crowd and the connoisseur to standards in oratory. *Brutus* (183–200) describes how the crowd which had initially admired a competent orator was overwhelmed by the skill of the great L. Crassus and admired him as enthusiastically as did the expert. The learned poem, Cicero adds, needs only the approval of a few, but a speech must rouse the crowd and needs their response to maintain its momentum. He cites the discomfiture of the fourth-century Greek Antimachus, author of epic and elegy on a grand scale, whose recitation of his own work was soon left with only Plato as audience. Did Cicero admire this poet whom Callimachus and Catullus' circle (cf. *Carmina* 95b) despised for his inflated style and scale? The orator judges poetry either by rhetorical or moral standards, seeing its purpose as protreptic, to move the listener by its emotive power to admire and emulate noble deeds. Ulysses cried out in pain in the lost *Niptra* of Pacuvius because of his wound; Cicero, writing on fortitude in the face of pain (*Tusculans* 2.48) reproaches the poet for showing weakness in a supposed hero. As an orator he was equally alert to what we might call reader-response, but the moral effect took priority over the aesthetic.

His last major critical work, *Orator*, a sort of utopian counterpart to the historical account of *Brutus*, was in many ways his most influential study (on Quintilian and St Augustine, for example), and its many shifts of approach show him struggling to leave an aesthetic testament as he calibrates the concept of personal style within a multi-dimensional measuring system, taking into account the genre, the immediate context and circumstances, the author, and every change of theme that invited a change of tone or dynamics within the discourse. He had to reconcile the quest for an ideal of versatility with the

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[8] Fantham, 'Genus-terminology', pp. 441–59.

three-style system. Among the problems was the ill-defined status of the middle style: to say it stood halfway between the plain and grand in degree of ornamentation gave it no distinctive features: a more promising approach associated it with the symmetrical antithesis of Isocratean composition, the flowing sweetness of epideictic ornamented with figures and rich vocabulary. The tripartite analysis may have gone back to Theophrastus' work on diction (used by Cicero at *Orator* 79) since Theophrastus seems to have developed references in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (3.12) to specific qualities of styles like the sweet or the grandiose. Cicero himself may have distrusted this finite labelling, and he had based his rhetorical character sketches in *Brutus* on a simpler polar antithesis between the plain argumentative mode and the grand poetic style.[9] Returning to the issue in *Orator* (20) he no sooner introduces the three standard levels of style than he subdivides them; the plain speaker, it appears, can be shrewd and pointed without artistry of form, or neat and well-turned; each stylistic mode can occur in a rhythmic or unrhythmic version. Again (26), the orator Demosthenes can raise or lower the level of his diction, increasing in ardour and boldness of imagery as his audience warms up. Between the different genres of prose outside oratory styles will again be distinct. It was Cicero who first recognised the scope of the third, negatively defined, branch of oratory: the residue after court and political speeches had been defined and prescribed for. History, philosophy, and all formal prose can be sheltered under the rubric of epideictic. Early in *Orator* (37) he illustrates this category from the sophists and Isocrates and notes that the relative artificiality of this kind of figured display-speaking is the best training for the more covert art required in senate and forum. Its deliberate symmetries and periodisation train the speaker to refine technique, giving him a more subtle control of rhythm and form.

    In the central section (*Orator* 60–112) Cicero starts from genre classifications in our sense, between sophistic, philosophic, historical, and poetic discourse, and isolates the sense of taste and propriety which a speaker must apply in both sentiment and language to match every circumstance: the audience, his adversary, his own role and the seriousness or triviality of the issue. It is this most relative of all criteria that Cicero singles out as the key to the successful control of style, and it is something we today begin to notice when we compose a formal utterance, such as an apology or letter of condolence, but would not normally consider when composing or criticising imaginative poetry or fiction. In fiction we are more interested in characterisation – what rhetoric called *ethopoeia* – than in variation of tone and tempo in narrative which may affect the reader by its relaxation or tension, irony, or commitment. But what concerns Cicero is tonal variety, the need for the artist to use the whole spectrum of colours from the plainest argumentative

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[9] Douglas (ed.), *Brutus*, pp. xxxiv–xxxv.

style to the impassioned grandeur of a denunciation or plea for mercy.
It is significant that his three sketches of style linger longest over the plain
idiom (75 – 90). His first specifications are negative, rejecting self-conscious
euphony and embellishment or Gorgianic figures, but he gives most attention
to illustrating the use of imagery, wit, and pithy sayings as the real ornament
of this idiom. He knows the difficulties of apparent simplicity, yet ultimately
cannot rest content with speech that ranges only from the simple to the
charming, and his ideal master of oratory specialises in the grand treatment
of great issues. If Cicero does not give us an analysis of the Sublime, he
still reflects the same hierarchy of values as will Longinus.

But there is a hidden item on Cicero's agenda. He is initially reticent
about rhythm, but takes pains to mark off the rhythmic from the unrhythmic
orator in outlining the plain and grand styles. The theme of rhythm and
patterned speech recurs in the first half of *Orator* before it is formally intro-
duced in the second. It is noted, for instance, as the differential between
the narrative mode of history (66) and the expository mode of philosophical
dialogue (62 – 4). To define prose rhythm and identify its effects demands
more subtlety than simply advocating attractive cadences like the notorious
Ciceronian *esse videatur*. Rhythm is as much a component of successful
prose as metre of classical verse; indeed, what we call free verse is free
simply in the sense of substituting non-recurring prose rhythm for regular
metre. While Cicero was preoccupied with the spoken word and with
persuasive as opposed to ceremonial oratory, he was struggling to define
a feature common to all polished literary texts. He realised that certain
logical or syntactical forms, like the antithetical sentence, generated their
own rhythm, and in an inflected language symmetry of syntax produced
rhythm or metrical equivalence in parallel form: the units of utterance
were balanced in sound as in sense.

After tracing the origin of prose rhythm to the desire to please the ear and
explaining the basis of quantitative metre that underlies the listener's reaction
to rhythmic prose, Cicero relates this strictly musical element to the arching
syntactical forms which give the periodic sentence its suspense and final release
with the completion of the thought. His account of the periodic sentence is
pioneering: a new if awkward step forward in aesthetics.

The periodic sentence should flow from its source so that when it reaches its goal it
comes spontaneously to a halt. This will not be difficult, since well-trained students
who have written much will make anything they utter, even without a written text,
seem like a regular composition. For the mind encompasses the thoughts, and the
words come together instantly released by the mind, swiftest of all things, so that each
word falls into position, and their ordered sequence ends with a different cadence in
different places. Indeed all the words from the beginning through the middle should
point forward to the last. The pace is now accelerated, now held back, so that you
must consider from the start how you want to reach the finish.   (*Orator* 199 – 201)

Thus his analysis of composition allows for three elements: arrangement, symmetry, and rhythm. He concludes that what is called rhythmic prose often springs not from deliberate rhythm but either from symmetry or from the natural order of words. One senses in Cicero's recognition of the greater freedom of epideictic to indulge in rhythm and ornament some regret that the fighting world of the forum imposed a more sober style, and that rhythm used to excess undermined the plausibility and pathos of the discourse. Certainly his own aesthetic sensibility leads Cicero to devote far more time in this work to aspects of technique which he had to play down in their practical context. At the time of *Orator* his only non-forensic prose (other than the private letters) were his rhetorical dialogues; *Orator* itself was not a dialogue but something more like the philosophical genre called protreptic (exhortation), and Cicero must already have conceived his plan of composing a philosophical corpus, just as the preface to *De legibus*, usually dated to 50 BC, shows that he seriously considered writing history. He was fully aware of the potential of prose discourse and had acquired practice in the quasi-drama of dialogue as well as some philosophical exposition. His account of the features required in artistic prose composition does not offer the common rules of rhetoric; these he could take for granted, nor would they have taken the student beyond the limit of professional oratory. What he did offer was seldom in the form of direct precept, but more often a complex blending of factors to be taken into account.

It is harder for the modern reader to look beyond Cicero so as to recover a picture of other rhetorical or linguistic movements in this fertile generation. The stimulus to Cicero's later work had been a reform movement objecting to 'Asianism' in oratory and grouping Cicero himself as an 'Asianist' alongside his predecessor Hortensius: but Asianism was a Greek term, applied by mainland Greeks to stigmatise the new trends of the rhetoricians in Asia Minor. The most famous instance of a Greek Asianist was Hegesias, whose surviving fragments show a jerky dislocation of thought into minute syntactical units. Cicero in *Brutus* (325) reports two varieties of Asian diction, the pointed style full of neat and patterned aphorisms, and the voluble style, excited, ornate and smart, but with more speed than symmetry. *Orator* adds to this description only the caution against sing-song delivery which Latin speakers would with typical prejudice denounce as unmanly, and he was eager not to be reckoned Asianist, carefully explaining that his own Rhodian training retained the good taste of the Athenian tradition, while Demosthenes was to emerge as his favoured model.[10] But his account of the new reform movement, the so-called Atticists, is not straightforward. Greeks of his time suffered from the inferiority complex of the post-classical period, and a nostalgia for the age of independence associated with the great speakers. Thus the earliest form of Atticism, a classicising return to the grace of Lysias and the fastidious

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[10] C. W. Wooten, *Cicero's Philippics and their Demosthenic Model* (Chapel Hill, 1983), pp. 46–57.

vocabulary of the fourth century, could be seen as a refining of vulgarity. We do not know how Calvus spoke, but the *Commentaries* of Caesar exemplify in their ostensible plainness and restrained vocabulary a similar refinement in Latin. But Cicero reports other Atticists who made the oblique and often abrupt idiom of Thucydides their model for Latin oratory (*Orator* 287 – 8): that such people existed is borne out by the historical prose of Sallust and Asinius Pollio, men of Brutus' age group who cultivated brevity, asymmetry, and sentences that seemed to end prematurely, frustrating the rhythmic expectation of the reader. They were memorable historians, but Cicero may not have been unfair to suggest that Thucydides was no model for public oratory, and that audiences would find the mannerisms of his imitators indigestible. It would seem that reaction had moved from purism to a new kind of affectation, while carrying the same banner of return to Attic standards.

6 *Grammatical scholarship in the Late Republic*

Purism also manifested itself in other ways during this generation. Focus on the word had moved since the deaths of Pacuvius and Accius (about 90 BC) from adventurous expansion of vocabulary to increasing restriction. Poets now coined words only on well-established precedent. The *grammaticus* Aelius Stilo objected to the superlative *novissimus* (Varro, *De lingua Latina* 6.59); Lucretius and Cicero, who need new vocabulary to express Greek physical and logical concepts, often complain of the poverty of Latin; the innovative orator Sisenna was treated as eccentric for his new formations (*Brutus* 259), and his *Histories* did not survive, because his style was not admired. When Cicero wants to systematise the Latin words *genus* and *species* as equivalents for Greek *genos* and *eidos* he has to use *forma* to supplement the cases of *species* which were not acceptable in Latin (*Topica* 30). This conservative language never imitated the syntactical flexibility or inventive power of Greek, although every well-educated Roman had learned to write in Greek and read most serious material in that language. Prose discourse was intended for a broad public, and Cicero knew that it was essential to use only familiar, even traditional, language. And there were no more great dramatic poets to convert the public to new flights of diction.

One factor was the rise of *grammatici*, another the philosophical preoccupation with etymology, as though the Word manifested the value of the Thing. Etymology appears intermittently in Ennius or Lucilius, and Lucretius argues (1.871 – 4) that the relationship between wood and fire is expressed in the way Latin *ignis* (fire) is found in *lignis* (logs), while Cicero explains the nature of the gods in *De natura deorum*, Book II, by etymologies. The Stoics saw the names of things as part of their nature and led the way to a quasi-philosophical analysis of word-roots, aiming at tracing word families to their origins. The grammarian Crates of Mallos, who came to Rome from Pergamum, and

Aelius Stilo, Varro's teacher, will have followed this theory, but the doctrine known as *analogia* does not seem to have been a problem at Rome until the fifties, when etymological theory was polarised between the Alexandrian trained advocates of *analogia* in determining word formation and the Stoic influenced supporters of *anomalia*. Both sides were committed to the importance of words as expression of the nature of what they named, but the anomalists saw merit in maintaining the inconsistencies of usage in word form and word inflexion, whereas the analogists believed language was based on consistent relationships (*to analogon*, 'ratio'), and inconsistent formations or declensions should be eliminated from the language. How was the individual to proceed? The conservatives would merely avoid inconsistent forms by using synonyms; the radicals seem to have advocated coining new by-forms, like Sisenna's active *adsentio* or Caesar's *frustro*, for the passive endings of everyday usage.

Caesar himself wrote two books *On Analogy* shortly after the publication of *De oratore* and dedicated them to Cicero, perhaps in reaction to Cicero's too brief dismissal of the issue of correct Latinity: certainly in his preface he affirmed the importance of correct speech even at a less glorious level than the formal public discourse in which Cicero excelled. So we find in the *Brutus* (252) the statement that Caesar set right bad usage by replacing it with good usage. Cicero stresses the difference between the usage of the ignorant and men of culture, but as a public speaker he was committed to accepting the anomalies that had grown up with usage, and he has adjusted his account of Caesar's views to suit his own. One famous remark attributed to Caesar shows his conservatism in choice of words; 'you should', he declares, 'steer clear of an unfamiliar word like a reef' (Gellius 1.10.4), and his own *Commentarii* keep a small conventional vocabulary.

The other scholar-critic who addressed himself to Cicero was the more learned but less gifted Varro, who studied and reproduced theories of language as he did every other kind of antiquarian research. Some ten years older than Cicero, Varro survived the triumviral period and died in 27 BC, the year that Augustus earned his honorific title by the Restoration of the Republic. Politically and intellectually conservative, he turned to antiquarian scholarship in earnest in 47 BC, and must have begun *De lingua Latina* at that time. The first four books (now lost) adopted the Hellenistic form of *Eisagōgē*, or Introduction, first establishing the claim of etymology to be an art, then defining its nature. Like Cicero in *De oratore*, Varro presented both sides of the argument, giving successively the case against and the case for etymology. Oddly it was not these fundamental books of theory but the more particular catalogues of etymologies and the triad of books on the controversy between the Analogists and Anomalists that he dedicated to Cicero. In the introduction to Book V he claims to have studied Aristophanes of Byzantium (the Alexandrian advocate of analogy) and Cleanthes, representative of the Stoic

support for anomaly, and explains that although there are four levels of etymological interpretation (common knowledge, grammatical tradition, philosophical explanation, and religious mystery), he himself will aspire to the philosophical level. The three books covering the dispute between the two theories are organised on the same principle as the first three, arguing first against analogy, then for it, and then in Book X synthesising conclusions.

What interests us most is Varro's recognition of the special status of poetry. Following Aristotle's distinction between regular vocabulary (*kuria onomata*), foreign and obsolete words, he separates poetic from ancient words with the artificial distinction that he derives much more pleasure than utility from the poetic vocabulary, but more use than pleasure from ancient words (5.9). This confusion of argument seems to arise because he has tried to combine discussion of glosses with the conventional literary dichotomy between pleasure and usefulness. To Varro, poetry offered two great benefits: the poets, unlike the orators, bound to normal usage, could be innovators; 'such new inflectional forms as are introduced by the analogical theory but are rejected by the speech of the forum, these the good poets, especially the dramatists, ought to force upon the ears of the people and accustom them to them. For the poets have great power in this sphere' (*De lingua Latina* 9.17). As he had said earlier, 'the poet can with impunity leap across all the boundaries'. But the second merit was fundamental to almost all of Varro's researches: the poetry that he loved celebrates and preserves national institutions. Thus the seventh book starts with the glorious line of Ennius promising the deification of Romulus and with the use of *templa* for the regions of the sky, a meaning associated with augury and the consecration of Rome's kings and magistrates. Most of the illustrations, even in fragmentary form, are recognisable as rich poetry, and most come from the now lost poets of epic, tragedy, or comedy.

For Varro's greatest contribution to Roman literary history was not through etymology, nor certainly through the merit of his own prose. He makes a significant appearance in the opening dialogue of Cicero's *Academics*. There Cicero compliments Varro on the breadth of his research into the national inheritance: 'It is', he says, 'as though we were strangers in our own city, and you made it known to us' (1.9). Varro has questioned the value of Cicero's decision to translate Greek philosophical works into Latin; students of philosophy can after all read the original works in Greek. Always alert to literary form, Cicero answers that men who read Roman adaptations of Greek tragedy and comedy for pleasure should derive equal enjoyment from the study of philosophy in their own language. In this courteous disagreement are embodied the limitations of the Roman educated class. While Catullus and Lucretius were creating original poetry, cultured Romans occupied themselves with gathering precious information about their country's past – like Varro, who for all his study of the Greeks imitated

neither their elegance of language nor clarity of argument – or else, like Cicero, they accepted Greek superiority and aimed chiefly to provide Romans with a body of derivative theoretical writings equal to those of Greece in interest and beauty of form.

Caesar had planned to make Varro director of the great library he would build: the library, in two parts, a Greek and a Roman collection, was finally inaugurated just before Varro's death, but we cannot tell whether he actively selected the contents of either collection. Indirectly at least he determined the Roman canon, through works begun in the fifties and certainly known to Cicero when he composed the *Brutus*. Varro's researches probably began with his investigation of the archives of the magistrates who supervised the dramatic festivals, recovering performance details for the plays of Plautus, Terence, and others. The information printed as *didascalia* in modern texts of Terence and surviving for two plays of Plautus, like the canon of twenty-one authentic Plautine comedies, goes back to Varro and his continuation of his master Stilo's work. Two other lost books, *De poematis* and *De poetis*, are the main source for the history of republican poetry transmitted by Horace, Suetonius, Gellius, Macrobius, and Jerome. The organisation of these works has been reconstructed.[11] While *De poematis* followed the traditional pattern (also evident in the first fifty chapters of Cicero's *Brutus*), defining the art and its function and tracing its origin and evolution through adolescence to the acme, *De poetis* was essentially historical, marking the inventor of each poetic genre, starting at Rome with the tragic playwright Livius. It is to this work that Cicero owes his landmark, pinning the first dramatic production to the year 240 BC. This work too signalled the birth and development of the art of poetry at Rome, and in both works Varro associated the prime with Ennius, who had already been dead over a century. Yet it seems unlikely that he acknowledged the corollary of this early acme and considered the question of decline, or the rise and fall of different genres as they emerged at Rome. He had the model of Greek literature, with its Classical phase now some 300 years in the past, to suggest what might be expected at Rome. But we have no evidence of Varro's attitude to contemporary authors and poets, and it is only with Velleius Paterculus, two generations later, that the comparative chronology of genres, each with its heyday and decline, is outlined for the arts and literature of Greece and extended to the literature of his own society.

[11] Hellfried Dahlmann, *Studien zu Varro De poetis* (Wiesbaden, 1963).