

## **Trends in Classics – Supplementary Volumes**

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### **Volume 20**

# **Generic Interfaces in Latin Literature**

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Encounters, Interactions and Transformations

Edited by

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Ahuvia Kahane

## The (Dis)continuity of Genre: A Comment on the Romans and the Greeks

**Abstract:** This paper considers some aspects of generic literary practice in Rome in relation to its Greek precedents. The paper proposes a model, drawn from the natural sciences and evolutionary biology, for characterizing genre and generic development within literary traditions. The model highlights the possibility of coexisting material and chronological continuities on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a somewhat more disjointed or discontinuous potential. The paper offers the example of Livius Andronicus in an attempt to illustrate how the model might operate, with brief emphasis, here, on the notion of translation (*vertere/exprimere*). The paper further considers principles underlying continuity of development in other, distinctly Roman texts and contexts, including Cicero commenting on a translation in the Twelve Tables and Pliny writing on death masks and the representation of ancestry (the latter – a kind of material / visual 'translation'). The paper suggests that '(dis)continuity' is significantly marked even within these distinctly Roman examples, even as they contain stronger, seemingly 'mono-cultural' and 'mono-lingual' traditions (the Tables as the foundation of a Roman juridical experience; *imagines* as a material representation of genealogical continuity among Roman elites, etc.).

**Keywords:** genre, evolution, Homer, Livius Andronicus, Ennius, *vertere*, *imago*, Pliny, Twelve Tables, translation

### 1 Introduction

This paper begins by suggesting a model, drawn from the natural sciences and evolutionary biology, for characterizing genre and generic development. This model, I submit, can highlight the possibility of coexisting material and chronological continuities and a somewhat more disjointed or discontinuous potential within literary traditions. I will invoke the example of Livius Andronicus in an attempt to illustrate how the model might operate within a reading of Roman generic practice and some of its relations to Greece, with brief emphasis, here, on the notion of translation (*vertere/exprimere*). The idea of translation is of basic importance to the relation between the cultures and literary outputs of any two languages and those of Greece and Rome in particular, where it has received



principles underlying continuity of development in other, distinctly Roman contexts. I will consider the example of a comment by Cicero on a translation in the Twelve Tables, and, further afield, a comment by Pliny, concerning death masks and the representation of ancestry, which—inasmuch as the creation of an imprint is a kind of basic, material transfer or ‘translation’—bear relevance for our question. I wish to suggest that (dis)continuity (as we might call it for brevity’s sake) is significantly marked even within these distinctly Roman examples, indeed, even as they contain stronger ‘mono-cultural’ and ‘mono-lingual’ traditions (the Tables as the foundation of a Roman juridical experience; *imagines* as a material representation of genealogical continuity among Roman elites, etc.).

I should stress that what follows constitutes only brief preliminary reflections on the reading of prototypical forms and generic traditions. I make no attempt to shift the ground in heated debates, for example about the degree to which early Roman literature, is, or is not, Hellenized, or about perceptions of cultural superiority or inferiority or other ‘anxieties of influence’ in the context of the emergence and formation of Latin literature. I do, however, want to draw attention to the possibility of a ‘third way’ which, as I shall explain, may allow for the existence of both a heightened awareness of generic continuity and the absence of continuity in Roman contexts.<sup>1</sup> The point is that these can exist in a distinct, simultaneous manner rather than in either mutually exclusive or amalgamated options. Within the possibility of a third way lies the prospect—which may be attractive to some but perhaps disappointing to others—of side-stepping at least some of the divisive choices we are currently required to make when approaching the question of Roman genre.<sup>2</sup>

## 2 A Parable from the Natural Sciences

Drawing on scientific discourse in discussions of culture, literature and literary genre is a long established tradition.<sup>3</sup> In the *Poetics*, for example, Aristotle famously invokes the notion of the magnitude of natural organisms in relation to the observer in developing a phenomenology of poetry in general and of

the form of tragedy in particular.<sup>4</sup> Aristotle and various later authors likewise grasp historical development in terms of organic, often teleological processes of incremental change, for instance, in the case of tragic poetry, as it rises from the dithyramb, evolves into a chorus and a single actor, and eventually into its three-actor form. In this essay, I nevertheless wish to invoke somewhat different views of nature, ones that place greater emphasis on discontinuous contingency.

My case from science relies on the following, greatly condensed example: Living organisms are the result of evolutionary change. Thus, the morphology of the African dung beetle, for instance, has evolved considerably in the course of time. The insect we are familiar with resembles a mass of dung. This resemblance gives the beetle, in Darwinian terms, a certain survival advantage. Of course, to understand the history of the species, we need to examine the insect’s earlier forms and the manner in which these fit into earlier environments. We also need to understand how the beetle’s present form, its functions and advantages, relate to its ancestral origins. Herein lies a problem, which I shall, a little apologetically, rephrase, in the provocative, but exact words of the eminent palaeontologist and evolutionary biologist Stephen J. Gould: ‘... can there be any edge,’ asks Gould as he considers the dung beetle’s evolution, ‘in looking 5 per cent like a turd?’<sup>5</sup> The question is rhetorical and the point is very serious indeed. Gould’s argument is that at the ‘5 per cent’ evolutionary stage there was, in fact, no ‘mass of dung’. The organism will have interacted with its environment in a different way. At this early stage of evolution it may have looked to its predators like a leaf, a clod of earth, or a poisonous fruit. At, say, the 6 per cent level, the organism’s nature or function or ‘meaning’ may have been different again. It will have interacted with its environment, not as a slightly-changed leaf or clod of earth, but as something else. It may have blended in with the texture or colour of rotting vegetation underfoot. The rule, Gould suggests, is that small-scale changes in morphology can coincide with relatively far-reaching changes to function and meaning.<sup>6</sup> We are, in other words, dealing with two different,

<sup>4</sup> Janko (1987, 89) on Aristotle, *Poetics* 50b37: “‘magnitude’: As at 49a19, this has the positive connotations of “grandeur”. Thus at *Politics* VII 1326a25ff. The finest city is the most populous that is not too large to be managed. In the case of animals the right size is relative to the ideal observer. So too for plots—one must be able to take it in as a whole. Memory in the case of plot corresponds to the observation in the analogy from biology.’

<sup>5</sup> Gould 1977, 104.

<sup>6</sup> This forms part of the argument against so-called ‘phyletic gradualism’ which states that evolution generally occurs uniformly and by the steady and gradual transformation of whole

<sup>1</sup> Beyond the scientific argument which is offered here lie wider, more-recent discussions, for example in so-called ‘post-continental’ philosophy (see, e.g., Mullarkey 2006). These later discussions are important, but lie outside the scope of our essay.

<sup>2</sup> For comments and further references on genre in ancient literature and in Rome, see recently Farrell 2005. For the term ‘literature’ and important caveats, see Feeney (2005, 228) and Goldberg

(2005, 107–108, 117–118, 120–121, 127–128, 130–131, 133–134). For genre more generally, see below, n. 7.

but overlapping, modalities, or types of development within the same object. These modalities are diametrically opposite to each other, yet they are synchronous and compatible. The first is a gradual, incremental evolutionary process wherein changes are small and characterized by continuity. The second is a series of discontinuous functions and mutations characterized by abrupt, contingent change.

### 3 Parable and Literary Genre

This model can, it seems to me, be useful when considering literary organisms, too. In literary history, as in biological history, we are, on the one hand, dealing with elements of a tradition in which we can identify continuous, incremental changes and the evolution of a kind of cultural DNA. Greek hexameters and Roman hexameters, for instance, both have six beats. Yet, on the other hand, even within the most tightly defined literary traditions we often also find works which can only be understood in terms of radical innovation that would make no sense except in a contingent, specific social context. Many literary histories present the relations between tradition and innovation as a kind of amalgam, as a mix in different proportions of different characteristics and cultures. The Gouldian model suggests another possibility. We can, for example, speak of intertextuality or indeed of allusion in a manner that allows for contact and continuity of form, yet does not necessarily imply or require a continuity of thought or function. This, we should note, is a slightly different view of intertextuality or allusion from the one originally proposed by Kristeva on the one hand or Gentili on the other, and which has had extensive influence in the field of classics and on the study, specifically, of Roman poetry. 'Gouldian' intertexts or allusions can demonstrate close affinity and can incorporate the intention of authors to mark such affinity or the perceptions of readers or audiences that identify affinity, yet keep the function or meaning of each reference within its own domain and in this sense far apart, perhaps even totally separate. The result, again, can be a diametrically polarized yet co-existent state of both tradition and innovation. This idea meshes with some existing notions of genre, but can provide more significant explanations in specific problem areas. For instance, the idea of incremental morphological development can accommodate formal conceptions of genre while usefully sidestepping the difficulty, in formal approaches, of accounting for differences in function. Our model may likewise suit 'Crocean' approaches which stress the unique character of every literary work in context, while nevertheless theorizing those elements of continuity with-

Continuous morphological changes in an evolutionary model work well with generic ideas based, for example, on (Wittgensteinian) 'family resemblance,' or, from another perspective, with notions of 'model criticism' ('model' here being used to describe a single source rather than a structured sequence or a rule) in antiquity. The idea of morphological continuity in the model can accommodate essentialist approaches to literary form that insist on the independent external reality of a text (an ontological 'essence,' e. g., the hexameter as an objective rhythmical characteristic independent of interpreters and interpretation), while allowing these to co-exist with what are often incompatible intentionalist approaches and, particularly, hermeneutic or phenomenological approaches, as well as arguments about the social construction of perspectives, values and objects. Considered within a performance approach to genre, an evolutionary model can provide a theoretical underpinning to the primacy of performance contexts. From a different angle, Kroll's influential idea of a *Kreuzung der Gattungen* can be re-described as a 'crossing' of morphological families or generic sets of attributes while, since, according to the model, every function is unique to its context, the idea of a generic set of functions, whether belonging to one genre or to two or more, can be left essentially un-determined, and thus receptive to specific contingent contexts.<sup>7</sup> In any case, we need to stress a point well-elaborated elsewhere, that, looking at literary histories, we must not conflate retrospective after-the-fact patterns with a generic capacity to determine future form or function.

### 4 Livius Andronicus' *Odusia*

Our subject, of course, is not genre in general, but Roman genre in particular, and its unique relation to the Greeks. As Denis Feeney, for example, says, 'It is worth reminding ourselves that, on the available evidence, no society in the ancient world other than the Romans took over the prototypical forms of the institution of Greek literature as the basis for a corresponding institution in their own vernacular.'<sup>8</sup> Consider, then, the case of epic and the much discussed exam-

<sup>7</sup> The literature on genre, pointed and general, practical and theoretical, is vast. In the context of antiquity, basic bibliographies can be found in Laird (2006, 474–475) and Rosenmayer (2006, 437–439). Kroll (1924), Cairns (1972), Russell (1981), Gentili (1988), Conte (1994), Barchiesi (2004), Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004) are a few of the many influential works. More generally, see recently Duff 2000. Moretti (2007) is useful. Herandi (1972) is older but serviceable.

<sup>8</sup> Feeney 2005, 230, also citing also Fantham (1989, 220) and comments by Don Fowler in the



ple of Livius Andronicus' *Odusia* and Homer's *Odyssey*. The *Odusia* is a good point of departure because it stands (almost) at the beginning of many historical narratives of Latin literature, because, *pace* satire, epic is the emblematic genre of Rome, and because epic in Rome especially bears out the capacity of genre to perform more than one function at a time. As Sander Goldberg says:<sup>9</sup>

...even when the practice of epic was at its lowest ebb, the *idea* of epic never lost its status. It was always the most prestigious, however under-achieving, poetic genre of Roman antiquity and by a kind of scholarly metonymy became the very symbol of literature itself [emphasis in the original].

Andronicus is a clear example of this principle, inasmuch as his *Odusia* is later famously brushed aside, for example by Cicero as 'quaint' (*Brutus* 71.12, *opus aliquod Daedali*), or by Horace, who complains about the rough movement of Saturnian verse (Horace, *Epist.* 2.1.157–8, *horridus ille // defluxit numerus Saturnius*) and the tedium of having to read Andronicus (*Odes* 2.1.71–73, cf. also *Epist.* 2.3.141–42), by the way Ennius reverts to the Muses in *Annles* 1, and so on.<sup>10</sup> Being 'first' in a manner that conflates chronological precedence and qualitative priority is an important characteristic of Greek epic and of Homer as its avatar. Ignoring this 'generic' epic conflation, as was the case among some of Andronicus' important Roman readers (he was considered 'first' but not 'best'), without damage to the Roman idea of epic (the 'best' Roman epic is not 'first') is in itself good indication that Roman genre, at least in relation to the Greek model, can be characterized by something other than coherence. We can here already see that the otherwise undisputed *idea* of the Romans following or taking over prototypical forms of the institutions of Greek literature does not necessarily bind us to any particular set of values or interpretive practice.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Goldberg 2005, 22.

<sup>10</sup> *Epist.* 2.3.141–142 are a revised translation of Homer's *Odyssey* 1–2, which, e.g., Sciarrino (2006, 456) describes as 'a corrective commentary on Livius's translation.'

<sup>11</sup> If the idea of following Greek epic values had been required, Andronicus' scanty remains and name could probably have been elided from the tradition, perhaps in the same way that Homer's predecessors, of which there certainly were many, were elided from the history of Greek epic. Broadly speaking this may suggest siding with e.g. Feeney (2005) against, e.g. Rüpke, Suerbaum, and Habinek in their several ways, and against the argument of a movement in Rome from orality and *carmina convivialia* to script. It is unimportant for the purposes of this essay to decide what precisely was the form of Greek epic verse before Homer (see differing views and

The *Odusia* is, of course, a translation of Homer's *Odyssey*. Furthermore, as Marco Fantuzzi and Richard Hunter suggest, "[t]ranslation" and its discontents had been a (perhaps *the*) central theme of the Roman engagement with Greek literature from the very beginning.<sup>12</sup> In other words, translation can be regarded as a key trope of Roman literary history and of Roman genre, too. Because of its explicit, close contact with a source text and its special idea of equivalence, translation is seen to embody (rightly or wrongly, both in practice and in theory) a continuity which resonates particularly well with the idea of an evolutionary transfer of 'poetic DNA' from one literary organism to another.<sup>13</sup>

Here, then, is the *Odusia*'s famous first line:<sup>14</sup>

Virum mihi, Camena, insece versutum

Tell me, Camena, of the clever man

which corresponds, of course, to the first line of Homer's *Odyssey*:

ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον ὃς μάλα πολλά

Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways who greatly...

The key is Andronicus' translation of πολύτροπος as *versutus*. Stephen Hinds suggests that Odysseus is here<sup>15</sup>

characterized by the "turn" which he has undergone from the Greek language into Latin. *Vertere* is the technical term *par excellence* for "translation" in early Latin literature (as in *Plautus vortit barbare*); and here in this programmatically loaded context our poet introduces a Ulysses whom the very linguistic switch to which he owes his textual existence has been made part of his proverbial versatility, has been troped into his *polytropia*.

There is an unambiguous referential link between the Greek and the Latin: both πολύτροπος and *versutus* denote the poem's eponymous hero who has wandered far and who has many ways of thinking and speaking. Andronicus knew his Homer, like any other literate Greek. Yet, as we know, the practice of translation, especially the translation of canonical work as opposed to ad hoc texts, is largely

<sup>12</sup> Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, 467.

<sup>13</sup> Many modern theories of translation, for example those influenced by Walter Benjamin's work, disagree in various ways. For readings see Venutti 2000. Overviews in Steiner (1992), Barnstone (1993), Ballard (1995), etc.

<sup>14</sup> For the text see recently Kruschwitz 2008. Bibliography in Flores 2011, 49–66.

alien to Greek culture.<sup>16</sup> Greek literature, including the poetry of Homer, did not emerge out of thin air. Some of its sources can be traced outside the Greek tradition (for example, in early Indo-European, Near-Eastern and Semitic traditions). But the pre-Christian Greek literary tradition did not acknowledge the literatures of other languages, and certainly not in the way that Roman literature looked back to the Greek canon. No Greek in the classical or Hellenistic period ever thought of Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, the work of the tragedians, the orators, the lyric poets, etc., as 'intertexts' of non-Greek works or in terms of allusion to non-Greek texts, let alone as texts that are wholly or partially translated. A prominent exception which proves the rule is the Septuagint, which was and remained separate from the canon of pre-Christian Greek literature.<sup>17</sup> In performative terms, that is with regard to Andronicus' (or the text's) act of translation *qua* speech act, the *Odusia's* Ulysses has not at all been 'troped' (as Hinds suggests) into the plurality of polytropy. The translation, as an act, constitutes, in performative terms, a radical break with Greek tradition rather than any act of evolutionary continuity.<sup>18</sup> *Vertere* as an index of the act of translation is here better viewed as a complete, almost solipsistic 'turnaround' or change of one function, Greek, into a different one, Roman, which leaves the past interlocutor silent in all ways except the nominal.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the closer we look at the Latin translation and the Greek original, especially if we take into consideration formulaic style, whether in the context of non-literate cultures or (once Homer is scripted and the monumental *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are canonized) as 'repetition,' the more we realize that Andronicus' translation is alien to Homer – regardless of our views concerning preceding 'oral' traditions in Rome. There is, for example, no evidence of early Roman formulaic style comparable to that of the systematic discursive structure of early Greek epic or its preceding Greek lyric forms. Formulaic style, we must stress, is not an external ornament, nor a merely 'formal' or 'aesthetic' characteristic – it is the verbal affect of an inherent performative tradition that nevertheless remains long after the contingent performative conditions that created or required it have disappeared. Thus, to take one specific if very prominent example, the *Odyssey's* first word, *andra*, as has often been

pointed out, is part of a proemic Greek epic pattern that relies on verse-initial localization and other formal features. This pattern is inherent to the discursive style and poetics of Homer, to Homer's 'traditional referentiality' (as John Foley has called it), its embedded character as tradition, as a discourse of 'imperishable fame' and thus of both its thematic and performative values.<sup>20</sup> Formally speaking, *virum*, which just about fits in verse-initial position in Andronicus' Saturnians, is metrically unsuitable (*vi-* is short) for similar localization in the Latin hexameter and is to my knowledge never so positioned in any extant Latin hexameter or elegiac texts or fragments. Virgil's *arma virumque* is an ingenious solution to the technical problem of adapting a Greek metrical / lexical / semantic / poetic tradition involving 'the man' to the form of Latin hexameters which possessed no formulaic performative tradition comparable to the one found in Homer. The fact remains that at real, quintessential technical levels of language, Greek Homeric discourse is not simply difficult to translate into Latin but is untranslatable. While the Latin translation can be nominally associated with Homer's Greek, it can, in a deeper sense, only invoke a completely different set of linguistic functions. Any other assumption would, paradoxically, invalidate the need for 'translation.'

This relationship of (dis)continuity is plainly replicated in many other details in the texts of Andronicus and Homer. To briefly stress just two of the best known: Homer's original *polytropos* is a compound adjective whose *poly-* element is not matched by any *multi-* element in its Latin counterpart and likewise the Greek Muse is not matched by Camena. In the same way, Andronicus' choice of the Saturnian as the metre, even as it facilitates at least a superficial analogy with Homeric usage, actually emphasises the point of 'un-mediatable' difference. The nature and structure of the Saturnian is a matter of dispute. Already in antiquity its inner workings were something of a mystery. Yet it is generally agreed that the form was used largely in short texts, rather than in long, monumental compositions. The Saturnian's basic performative function and reference are thus alien to the function and reference of the Greek hexameter. The Greek form, although it too was sometimes associated with short texts such as oracles and funerary inscriptions, is, needless to say, the canonical vehicle of long, authoritative verse compositions. Furthermore, the magnitude of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, whatever its narrative function, was a marked cultural symbol of the poems' canonical authority and an embodiment of their 'pan-Hellenic' aspira-

<sup>16</sup> See Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, 471.

<sup>17</sup> For the Septuagint see Rajak 2009.

<sup>18</sup> In other words, it is not a question of the level of sophistication we attribute to Andronicus (cf. Hinds 1998, 61, n. 18) nor a matter of authorial intention.

<sup>19</sup> Reconstituted phenomenologically and with due caution concerning reductive medial (e.g. 'oral' vs. 'written') approaches and ethical ('primitive' vs. 'cultivated' or 'advanced') judgements, the (dis)continuity of (epic and) lyric here deserves reconsideration. See some

<sup>20</sup> On Homer's proems see, e.g., Redfield 1979; Pucci 1982; Kahane 1994. For traditional pre-



tions.<sup>21</sup> The Saturnian's status was no match for the Greek hexameter, and later Romans, famously Horace, as we noted, held the Saturnian in low esteem (*Epist.* 2.1.156–9). More importantly, there is no evidence to suggest that it was ever regarded as a vehicle for 'pan-cultural' identity. Indeed, at least some scholars have argued for the Saturnian's links to native Italic and Latin traditions. Llewelyn Morgan has recently suggested that the form may manifest a resistance to the 'Hellenic' character as embodied in the hexameter.<sup>22</sup> The Saturnian may rely on stress patterns or on quantity, but already this lack of an unambiguous character represents a radical departure from the Greek hexameter, whose highly regulated and formalized quantitative character is, and always has been, clearly set out regardless of any issues of pitch accentuation. It is not clear that as an act of reference to *Odyssey* 1.1's — ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ — ◡ | ◡ — ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ — x, the Latin ◡ — ◡ — | ◡ — ◡ | — ◡ ◡ — — x (the quantitative representation of the metrics of Andronicus, fr. 1) would have invited substantive interaction. Andronicean audiences listening to his verse or reading the text will probably have acknowledged a nominal link to 'Homer's hexameter', but it is unlikely that the Homeric hexameter in any detail will have presented a meaningful substantive resonance in such encounters.<sup>23</sup> Summing up the force of the first line of the *Odusia*, Sander Goldberg's formulation may thus be closer to the truth:

Andronicus shows at once his capacity for close but clever translation ... *Small changes, however, also recast the original thought in distinctly Roman terms* [my emphasis].<sup>24</sup>

Goldberg, however, does not quite advocate a 'Gouldian' approach. We should therefore shift the emphasis and suggest that, while Andronicus' act of translation is in explicit contact with Greek culture, it represents a significant cultural break, and is in this sense an 'ancestor-less,' monophone rather than polyphonic Roman poem, a kind of 'ventriloquising' voice or, to change metaphors, a mere

<sup>21</sup> For Homer and pan-Hellenism see Nagy 1979.

<sup>22</sup> See Cole 1969; Parsons 1999; Kruschwitz 2002; Morgan 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Farrell, pointing in part to Homeric scenes in early visual representations, suggests that Homer was not unknown in Italy. 'The idea that Livius Andronicus introduced Roman readers to Homer and so introduced Hellenic literary culture to Rome has come to seem hopelessly simplistic and badly in need of correction' (2005, 423). My point is certainly not that Homer was unknown, let alone that Andronicus did not know Homer, but that contact with Homer does not preclude an *Odusia* which is a radical break from Homeric poetry. The same symptom of a radical break can be found, for example, in modernity, in Ezra Pound's translation of the

*imago* or nominal ghost of polytrophy, rather than a truly intertextual work.<sup>25</sup> As Jörg Rüpke, Alessandro Barchiesi and many others have recently argued (in their very different ways), early Roman poets may not, in fact, have produced scripts that manipulated and translated Greek codes.<sup>26</sup> Their scripted Latin translations 'acquired cultural relevance [only] through acts of performance.'<sup>27</sup> Suetonius for example, in *de Grammaticis et Rhetoribus* (1.2), notes that Livius Andronicus and others like him performed their Latin epic in both private and public settings, and, on the unenthusiastic evidence of Horace again (*Odes* 2.1.71–73, cf. also *Epist.* 2.3.141–42), we may perhaps surmise that they did so in pedagogical settings in a patron's house. Enrica Sciarrino suggests, perhaps rightly, that<sup>28</sup>

when the poet recited from his epic script in his hands or performed this script from memory, he was not an impersonating actor interacting with other equally impersonating actors in a make-believe situation, he was an outsider who fulfilled the desires of cultural mastery felt by Roman insiders for the sake of social self-promotion.

Let me briefly add (this requires extended separate discussion) that everything we know about the performance of Homeric poetry in Greece (see, e.g. *Homeric Hymns* 3.149–50, 26.11–13; Hesiod fr. 357, cf. *FGrHist* 328 F 212; Dionysius Thrax 180.12–17; Plato, *Hipparchus* 228b; Lycurgus, *Leocr.* 102, etc.) suggests nothing of the kind.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, 'Homeric' performance is not of uniform character. The self representation of bardic singing within Homer (the songs of the *oidoi* Phemius and Demodocus) is not the same as the rhapsodic performances, be they in the context of the Homeridae or of Plato's Ion, and those rhapsodic performances are very different from the performative act embodied in the Pisistratean recension, if it ever occurred, in the agglomeration which we sometimes call the Vulgate, or the editorial actions of the Alexanderian scholars Aristarchus, Zenodotus and Aristophanes and others, which are, in a broad sense, 'performative' too.

<sup>25</sup> Ennius' *Annales* 322–3 (Skutch): *begins soce Musa manu Romanorum induperator//quod quisque in bello gessit cum rege Philippo* is a useful comparator. The Muse begins something which takes over 'Livius' distinctive verb *insece* and corrects 'Camena to Musa', but also starts something completely new (see Hinds, 1998, 59). The term ventriloquism here can be compared conceptually to its use in, e.g., discussions of the exclusion of the female voice in Greek lyric poetry (see, e.g. Skinner 1993). For *imago*, see further below.

<sup>26</sup> Rüpke 2001; Barchiesi 2002; Sciarrino 2006, etc.

<sup>27</sup> Sciarrino 2006, 454.

<sup>28</sup> Sciarrino 2006, 457.



## 5 Cicero, Solon, and translation of the law

It lies beyond the scope of this short essay to define the place of such (dis)continuity within the general character of Roman genre and its relation to the Greeks. I do, however, wish to follow up the argument about the possibility of a mechanism of (dis)continuity<sup>30</sup> by briefly presenting some evidence for similar generic practice within wider Roman contexts which may have particular significance.

In Latin, to ‘translate’ is *vertere*, *convertere*, *traducere* and so on. But, as Marco Fantuzzi and Richard Hunter for instance note, at its ‘most faithful,’ at its least free from ‘innovation,’ the proper term is *exprimere*.<sup>31</sup> The primary sense of this verb concerns the application of pressure to an object or a substance. *Exprimere* thus embodies the idea of producing a close likeness or a copy of something, as in the process of *ex-pression* or rather the *im-pression* of a seal. In this sense, the idea is not literary or abstract, but material. This idea of matter, which seems to exclude the intervention of an interpreter or a ‘mind’, seems to safeguard the process of replication and representation from the corrupting influence of personal agendas. Not surprisingly, the act sometimes takes on legal tones. Contagion, the physical imprint of matter in matter, for example of the seal on the surface of the clay or wax, is meant to guarantee the integrity of the transfer and the authenticity of the resulting image.<sup>32</sup> Yet, paradoxically, precisely the thing that preserves the authenticity of the original can, once transferred into a new context, sometimes produce a separation from the original source. In *De Legibus* (2.64), for example, Cicero suggests that one of the laws of the Twelve Tables—one can hardly think of a more Roman setting or a setting with greater public/civic authority and legal import—prohibiting excessive worship of dead ancestors, was translated (*expressa*) directly from the Greek of Solon’s laws:

Postea quom, ut scribit Phalereus <Demetrius>, sumptuosa fieri funera et lamentabilia coepissent, Solonis lege sublata sunt, quam legem eisdem prope uerbis nostri decem uiri in decimam tabulam coniecerunt. Nam de tribus reciniis et pleraque illa Solonis sunt. De lamentis uero expressa uerbis sunt: ‘Mulieres genas ne radunto neue lessum funeris ergo habento.’

Later, according to the man of Phalerum [Demetrius of Phaleron], when extravagance in expenditure and mourning grew, it was abolished by the law of Solon—a law which our decemvirs took over almost word for word [*quam legem eisdem prope uerbis ... coniecerunt*] placed in the tenth Table. For what it contained about the three veils, and most of the rest, comes from Solon and in regard to mourning they have followed his wording exactly [*de lamentis uero expressa uerbis sunt*]: ‘Women shall not tear their cheeks or have a *lessum* at a funeral.’<sup>33</sup>

There is something both revealing and paradoxical about this context and the prohibition of excessive lament and attachment to the past which draws its authority from a venerated past source, which itself draws its authority from the word-for-word translation of a Greek ‘ancestral’ source. The important thing about the law, of course, is that a law is precisely the verbal instance of a general rule which is meant to resist corruption in individual contexts. In the context of law, the possibility of ‘many ways’ or ‘tropes’ for doing things is sometimes inevitable, but always to be guarded against. ‘Polytropy’ (to borrow the Odyssean word, as it is used by Hinds and others) is not an appropriate quality in the context of the law. In principle, law dictates that you do something in one way only. The translation of a law should preserve this principle. Officially at least, one does not want translations, or indeed laws, that have ‘many ways’ or that are, like Odysseus/Ulysses, famed for their trickery and wiles (cf. *Odyssey* 9.19–20). It is not surprising that Cicero insists here that the decemvirs translated the law almost ‘word for word.’ Yet, apparently, in maintaining close contact with the original, in preserving it and transferring it into its new context, the original’s meaning was lost and a gap opened up. We do not know the Greek of Solon’s law or of Demetrius’ version. More significantly, even the Latin of this law in the tenth Table was inscrutable: ‘Women shall not tear their cheeks or have a *lessum* at a funeral.’ This rare word (but cf. also *Tusc.* 2.55), presumably *lessus*, was, as Jonathan Powell states, as ‘unintelligible’ to Cicero as it is to us. He adds: ‘We should bear in mind, that the text available to Cicero may also have contained corruptions of forms no longer understood.’ The interpretation of ‘lamentations,’ Powell notes, seems likely. Nevertheless, ‘Cicero quotes the spec-

<sup>30</sup> See similar readings of (dis)continuity in Kahane (2010) on Homer and the Jews; 2003 on Cavafy, modern Greek experience and antiquity, and Kahane (1999) on modernist poetry, Pound and Homer. The argument, broadly speaking, is against models of cultural ‘hybridity’ and for models of distinct multi-cultural co-existence.

<sup>31</sup> Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, 468.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. e.g., de Witt (1936, 505) still correctly: ‘Every Roman gentleman carried a ring bearing a seal. To seal a letter he pressed the seal into the wax (*imprimo*); he then removed it (*exprimo*), leaving the impress of the device. Hence “express” means to copy, portray, as in Cicero, *Pro Milone* 10.6, *quam ... ex natura ipsa ... expressimus*, [a law] “which we have ... copied ... from

ulations of Roman commentators who clearly know no more than we do (even the earliest of them, Sextus Aelius Paetus Catus, was stumped).<sup>34</sup>

It seems, then, that close contact (just like in the process of stamping a seal), the juridical impression of continuity (as in *expressa*) in Cicero's comments on translation, is analogous to the morphological evolutionary (dis)continuity we find in the Gouldian model of genre and in Andronicus' translation of Homer. Cicero's 'faithful translation,' the true impression/expression, particularly as it is a legal matter that demands stability and resistance to change, this distinctly Roman law, is cut off, not only from any historical Solonian origin, but even from the Latin of the Tables which Cicero quotes (indeed, citation is an even closer mode of contact than translation). It is, we might almost say, a law onto itself.<sup>35</sup> Let us also note again that this particular law and Cicero's discussion concern a prohibition against lament which we could perhaps describe in more-abstract terms as a prohibition of excessive attachment to the dead and the past (by an author who commonly invokes the authority of the past<sup>36</sup>). What we are dealing with is not an adaptation, not a hybrid of Greece and Rome, not an amalgam or a transformative halfway point, not a mix of early Rome and Ciceronian interpretation, but rather a paradoxical Gouldian modality of close verbal (and metaphorically, material) contact and in this sense only a 'small' alteration, yet equally a very significant change in context and function.

## 6 *Imago*: material translations of the past

Cicero's aspiration to a faithful image of the past is often expressed elsewhere in his work, for example, in a literary-generic context, when he cites Ennius' epitaph in *Tusculans* (1.34):<sup>37</sup>

Aspicite, o cives, senis Enni imaginis formam:  
Hic vestrum panxit maxuma facta patrum.

Gaze, fellow citizens on aged Ennius form and face  
He set to verse your fathers' greatest deeds.<sup>38</sup>

Conventionally in the ancient world visualization is closely associated with clarity (*enargeia*), and it is certainly so for the Romans in the context of visual images of the past and images of the dead.<sup>39</sup> However, English translation here (as everywhere: *traduttore traditore*...) lets us down, since *imago* is not merely a 'face' but specifically a death mask.<sup>40</sup> The force of the epitaph and its claim to authority relies on the assumed fidelity of *imaginis formam* – whether literally, and associated with a portrait of Ennius which may have existed in the tomb of the Scipios or through an act of imagination (the creation of a mental *imago*): We are meant to be looking at the poet's face, extracted and recreated through a process of contagion with the face of the dead. The implication is that, just as the object of our gaze is the true face of Ennius, so his verses are a faithful representation of the greatest deeds of Rome's ancestors. Yet we have nothing of this faithful visual image, only the word *imago*. Ennius is unseen.

It is this unseen element, the element that breaks the sequence of an image, that I wish to stress in the second and final example in this essay. My example comprises an even more explicit illustration of the true force or character of 'continuity,' especially with regard to material copies of the past in Rome and thus, *a fortiori* with regard to less tangible sequences.

In book 35 of the *Historia Naturalis*, Pliny discusses the history of art, a useful general parallel to the history of literature, especially in antiquity, where visual art is often a paradigm (*ut pictura poesis*...) of literature. In this part of the work (35.4), Pliny speaks about *imaginum picturae*, which is sometimes translated as the 'painting of portraits.' But, as both Roman cultural historians and general art historians agree, this is better translated as 'painted images or ancestral death-masks.'<sup>41</sup> These, Pliny says, are 'used to transmit through the ages extremely correct [*maxime similes*, i.e. most "faithful"] portraits of persons.' (35.4).

Discussing the relationship between past and present, between ancestors and descendants, Pliny complains that in his present day 'indolence has destroyed the arts,' yet (35.6):

<sup>34</sup> Powell 2005, 144 and n. 78.

<sup>35</sup> Compare contemporary philosophical/jurisprudential thought, beginning with Max Weber (who was trained in Roman jurisprudence and was, at the time of his Habilitation, designated as Theodor Mommsen's successor) and most prominent today in the work of Giorgio Agamben (on the law and on the concept of sovereignty, esp. in the context of Augustus, see Agamben 2005), exploring the paradoxical status of sovereign law as a concept which itself has no law.

<sup>38</sup> Translation J. E. King (LCL).

<sup>39</sup> For *enargeia*, see, e.g. Vassaly 1993, Ch. 3.

<sup>40</sup> For death masks in Rome, see Flower 1996.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Harriet Flower (1996: 32–59) and Georges Didi-Huberman (1999: 79). For



aliter apud maiores in atriis haec erant, quae spectarentur; non signa externorum artificum nec aera aut marmora: expressi cera vultus singulis disponebantur armariis, ut essent imagines, quae comitarentur gentilicia funera...

In the halls of our ancestors it was otherwise; portraits were the objects displayed to be looked at, not statues by foreign artists, nor bronzes nor marbles [*non signa externorum artificum, nec aera aut marmora*], but wax models of faces [*expressi cera vultus*] were set out each on a separate side-board, to furnish likenesses [*ut essent imagines*] to be carried in procession at a funeral in the clan...<sup>42</sup>

These likenesses or *imagines* are faithful ‘translations’ of faces, moulded in wax, whose fidelity is vouchsafed, as in the case of seals, ‘juridically,’ by the idea of contagion and of a literal imprint of matter on matter. The act of material carrying-over (‘translation’), the genealogical, or morphological, or evolutionary transfer from one instance of the form to another, is not mutable or *polytropic*. It is as clearly defined as, for example, the law. Yet, as Harriet Flower stresses:<sup>43</sup>

The *imagines* were clearly designed for use by the living members of the family. They had no role to play in cult or commemoration of the dead at the tomb [my emphasis].

The practice surrounding *imagines*, although these are faithful impressions of ancestors, seems almost to follow the spirit of the injunction in the Twelve Tables against excessive mourning for ancestors and worship of the past. Flower adds:

They [the *imagines*] represented only family members who had held at least the office of the *aedile*. Their function is, therefore, overtly political, and it is not related to beliefs about life after death. Their use by actors to impersonate the ancestors at family funerals served to politicize such occasions [my emphasis].

*Imagines* are drawn from the model of Roman life: the face of the dead Roman ancestor, indeed, not simply *qua* ancestor, but more specifically and exclusively as an ancestor within the setting of Roman political life. One assumes that *imagines* preserved the material contours of individual ancestral faces. That, indeed, is the whole point of the waxen imprint and the object it creates. Yet, as Flower demonstrates at length in her book, these are ‘translations’ that have little to do with commemoration of the dead in Rome, let alone with Rome’s more distant cultural past or, for that matter, with Greece. We should add that, as Pliny notes, these Roman *imagines* do not involve the work of any ‘foreign artist’ (*externorum artificum*), which in this context can only mean ‘Greek artists.’ These, at

least, a Roman might say (*pace* Quintilian), are *totae nostrae*. The *imagines* are completely in the possession of the first person, the self, the present.

The Gouldian modality of (dis)continuity in the context of the Latin *exprimere* can, we may add, be observed in the semantics of the word *imago* itself, as a translation from Greek, and indeed in the idea of *imagines mortuorum*, in which *imago* denotes both the ancestral death-mask, a public *eikôn*, a juridical object dependent on material fidelity, but equally the Greek *eidôlôn*, a private, ethereal image totally devoid of material substance.

## 7 Envoi. Discontinuity and discontent

We can now go back to Livius Andronicus ‘translation’ of Homer’s *Odyssey* and to our comments on Roman genre and the Greeks. Andronicus’ translation is an object of obvious continuity which is clearly cut off from its Greek model but which, furthermore, at least on the evidence of such readers as Horace and Cicero (this requires further discussion, of course), is equally cut off from the Latin epic poets that were to follow. As we noted, Marco Fantuzzi and Richard Hunter have suggested that “‘translation’ and its discontents had been a (perhaps *the*) central theme of the Roman engagement with Greek literature from the very beginning.’ They are right, of course, but we should stress the element of ‘discontent’ in their words. It is not merely an indication of opposing forces within historical sequences. It can perhaps be re-deployed in a slightly more technical sense, as a reference to the famous ‘discontents’ in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, the title by which Sigmund Freud’s *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930) is known in English translation.<sup>44</sup> *Das Unbehagen* is a term which, in Freud, signifies both the generic conformity of the individual to the shared rules of civilization and his/her solipsistic, uncontrollable drives. It characterises a unique, irreplaceable essence in both persons and works of art. The move from *das Unbehagen* to ‘discontents’, like the move from *Kultur* to ‘civilization,’ from German to English (where the tensions between the two cultures are precisely the historical/political context to Freud’s masterpiece in the years immediately preceding the War), involves both continuity and rupture, as many students of Freud and of modernity have shown. It is a move that, like modern evolutionary biology, is very far from classical antiquity, yet which can mark very precisely an essential,

<sup>44</sup> Freud 1961. Richard Hunter and Marco Fantuzzi nevertheless inform me (personal com-

paradoxical but possibly common quality of Roman genre and its relation to the Greeks.

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## Architectural Ecphrasis in Roman Poetry

**Abstract:** Any definition of ecphrasis should take into account an important sub-category, architectural ecphrasis, which is a feature of imperial panegyric texts. A cultural shift in the first century CE from *negotium* to *otium*, from the public monument to the villa, fostered the development of a new form of encomiastic poetry, much of it celebrating private life. Architectural ecphrasis is a mainstay of Statius' *Silvae*; the 'occasional poem' emerges as a new literary genre of the first century CE.

**Keywords:** Architectural ecphrasis; villa; temple; occasional poem; purple patches; rhetorical treatises; Apollo Palatinus; Mars Ultor; Pollius Felix

I then gathered for myself ... for each of the structures which I knew how to build, the finest timbers I could carry. . . Accordingly, I would advise everyone who is strong and has many wagons to direct his steps to that same forest where I cut these props, and to fetch more for himself and to load his wagons with well-cut staves, so that he may weave many elegant walls and put up many splendid houses and so build a fine homestead, and there may live pleasantly and in tranquility both in winter and summer. (King Alfred the Great (r. 871–99 CE), preface to his translation of *St. Augustine's Soliloquies*)<sup>1</sup>

Is ecphrasis a separate literary genre? The question invites a reevaluation of the place of ecphrasis in literary history and goes back at least to Lessing, who saw it as ornament, not a genre, following Quintilian (*Inst.* 8.61–71), who specifically classified it as a figure of speech (*Inst.* 9.40–4). For many critics who have attempted to breach the barrier that Lessing raised between the literary and visual arts, neither 'ornament', with its connotations of superfluity, nor 'genre', with its formalist connotations, has seemed appealing;<sup>2</sup> Heffernan, for instance, prefers to speak of ecphrasis as a 'mode', a rather vague and elastic literary term.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand Mitchell makes large claims for ecphrasis as a genre, claiming that it resists classification as ornament or even as a minor genre.<sup>4</sup> True, for

<sup>1</sup> Cited from S. Keynes and M. Lapidge (1983) (transl.), *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, London, 138.

<sup>2</sup> On the gendered roots of the mistrust of 'ornament' see Scott 1991, esp. 305–8. On the limitations of a purely formalist approach to genre see Goldhill 2008, 185–90.

<sup>3</sup> Heffernan 1993 1–7