

## Cicero and Early Latin Poetry

D. R. SHACKLETON BAILEY

The Romans of Cicero's day were introduced to the old Latin poets at an early age; set to study them, along with their Greek models, under a *grammaticus* and to learn passages by heart. What impression they made on the child Cicero is not recorded. His defence of Archias professes devotion to literature, including poetry, from boyhood upwards, but does not particularize. Plutarch's biography<sup>1</sup> supplies the information that he wrote poetry himself while still a boy, that is to say by 89 B.C. at the latest, producing a work in tetrameters (presumably trochaic) called in Plutarch's Greek Πόντιος Γλαῦκος, "Glaucus in the sea." The title, suggestive of a Hellenistic epyllion, could reflect the influence of the most notable Latin poet of the period, the now almost obliterated Laevius, whom Cicero never mentions. But the metre tells nothing. Laevius used it, but so had Lucilius in non-dramatic compositions.

Other poems followed and, if Plutarch is believed, carried Cicero into reputation as Rome's leading poet and leading orator in one. Most of them were probably written in the eighties before he set out on his career in the law-courts, and Plutarch's statement should mean on a conservative view that in the seventies and perhaps the sixties Cicero's poetry enjoyed a considerable vogue — decades, to be sure, which seem to have been far from fruitful in this area. He must have been proud of it at the time, yet it is never mentioned in his surviving writings, except for the renderings of Aratus' poem on astronomy. From the titles preserved it seems that the poet Cicero continued to look to Alexandria; the traditional Roman genres — drama, epic, satire — apparently did not inspire him. If we choose to draw the inference that at this stage Cicero was not the professed admirer of the early Roman

---

<sup>1</sup> *Vit. Cic.* 2. 3.

poets which we later find him, there is nothing to gainsay it. His juvenile work on rhetoric, *De inventione*, contains eight illustrative quotations from them, but three of these seem to have been borrowed from the treatise *Ad Herennium* or a common source. The speeches of the years prior to his Consulship contain only one clear quotation, from Ennius, in the defence of Roscius of Ameria.<sup>2</sup> Allusions are rare too. There is one in the same speech<sup>3</sup> to a situation in Caecilius' comedy *The Changeling* and another in the defence of Caecina,<sup>4</sup> where the name "Phormio" recalls the title role in Terence's play. A reference to the Plautine pimp Ballio in the defence of the actor Roscius<sup>5</sup> can be discounted as arising from his client's acting of the part. Admittedly the introduction of such allusions, and still more of actual quotations, by a young advocate might be felt as something of a liberty. In the *Pro Roscio Amerino*<sup>6</sup> he does in fact apologize to the court and even pretends to be uncertain of the name of one of Caecilius' characters. But, as will presently be seen, the case is much the same with the consular and for some years with the post-consular speeches.

In his mid-forties, probably after a long interval, Cicero took again to verse-writing, but no longer just for art's sake. The poems *On my Consulship* — a theme which also inspired him to prose, both Latin and Greek — and *On my vicissitudes* (*De temporibus meis*, i.e. his exile and restoration), like the later, probably unpublished, compositions on Julius Caesar and on Britain, were topical, if not tendentious. And so perhaps essentially was the mysterious *Marius*, if it belongs to this epoch. We may conjecture that the banishment of his great co-townsmen was its principal theme, seeing that both the two significant fragments<sup>7</sup> seem to have to do with that episode. It was probably about this time, in the early fifties, that Latin poetry entered on a new, exciting phase with the advent of Catullus and his fellow-neoterics (I use the term without prejudice). They too looked to Alexandria, but more especially to Callimachus and Euphorion of Chalcis. Hence Cicero's reference in his *Tusculan Disputations*<sup>8</sup> to *his cantoribus Euphorionis* — whatever exactly he meant by *cantoribus*. For myself I am inclined to agree with the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*: "one who sings the praises

---

<sup>2</sup>*Rosc. Am.* 90.

<sup>3</sup>*Rosc. Am.* 46.

<sup>4</sup>*Caec.* 27.

<sup>5</sup>*Rosc. com.* 20.

<sup>6</sup>*Rosc. Am.*, 46.

<sup>7</sup>*Cic. poet. fr.* 7 and 8 (Morel).

<sup>8</sup>*Tusc.* 3. 45.

(of)," given the analogous uses of *canto* and *cano*; that does not mean that the associations with song and recitation were absent from Cicero's mind. Indeed, I suspect that he was not entirely clear himself which of several possible senses he intended, and chose the phrase for its contemptuous ring. However that may be, it appears beyond reasonable doubt that these *cantores Euphorionis* are practically to be identified with the "new poets," οἱ νεώτεροι, casually but slightly mentioned in a letter to Atticus<sup>9</sup> of the year 50, and again, as *novi poetae*, in the *Ora-tor*.<sup>10</sup> This of course debouches into another and more important controversy, in which I can only subscribe to Oliver Lyne's opinion<sup>11</sup> that in the context οἱ νεώτεροι must refer to a recognized group of writers, though the term itself need not and probably should not be taken for a recognized label. The novelties of theme and technique which these writers introduced, not to speak of their poetic merits, will have made Cicero's juvenile essays look *vieux jeu*. Hence perhaps his disapproval. Literary antagonism did not rule out friendly personal contacts, such as existed between Cicero and Catullus' best-known "neoteric" associate Calvus — with whom he also disagreed on the theory and practice of oratory. Nor am I one of those who detect sarcasm in Catullus' *disertissime Romuli nepotum*. But Cicero's depreciatory remarks about the group are positive evidence of a dislike which could have been surmised even without them, first from the absence in his writings of any reference to individual contemporary Latin poets other than himself and his brother (apart from the incidental mention of Lucretius and one Sallustius in a well-known passage of his correspondence<sup>12</sup>); and second, from his own abandonment of poetic composition, or at any rate publication, in the mid-fifties. E. M. Morford writes in his article "Ancient and modern in Cicero's poetry":<sup>13</sup> "...it is a fair supposition that disgust at the trend of Roman poetry in the hands of the younger set in part drove him to turn his back finally on poetry." But why the disgust? Cicero's personal vanity had better not be left out of the reckoning. His nose had been put out of joint.

Resenting the new movement, Cicero might naturally go out of his way to make much of the early authors whom the newcomers decried. Not that I question the common view that national sentiment, or jingoism or chauvinism if preferred, was involved, as it also was in

<sup>9</sup>*Att.* 7. 2. 1.

<sup>10</sup>*Orat.* 161.

<sup>11</sup>"The Neoteric Poets," *Classical Quarterly* 28 (1978), p. 168.

<sup>12</sup>*Q. fr.* 2. 10(9). 3.

<sup>13</sup>*Classical Philology* 62 (1967), p. 112.

his exaggerated appreciation of the elder Cato's oratory and of the wealth of the Latin language. It is worth noting that he shows no such partiality to the Roman historians, but there he has an axe to grind: Rome needed a new and better historian, Cicero.<sup>14</sup> However, the uprush of the old poets precisely in his speeches of 56-54 is likely to be more than a coincidence.<sup>15</sup> Quintilian<sup>16</sup> remarks that quotations from Ennius and company are found chiefly (*praecipue*) in Ciceronian oratory, though Asinius Pollio and those who immediately followed him (*qui sunt proximi*) often introduced them. That seems to imply that Cicero was the first to do this, and that his closer contemporaries, such as Caelius, Calidius, and Caesar, did not follow suit.

Out of thirteen extant speeches belonging to the years 63 to 57 the only one to quote from this literature, unless we count a corrupt scrap in *Leg. Agr.* 2. 93 and a few words in *Post. red. in sen.* 33 which derive from Accius' *Atreus*, is the *Pro Murena* of 63, which has a line from the *Annals* of Ennius, who is called *ingeniosus poeta et auctor valde bonus*, on the relationship between peace and the rule of law,<sup>17</sup> and another from some tragedy.<sup>18</sup> The defence of the poet Archias in the following year before a court presided over by Quintus Cicero (a better poet than Marcus, as Marcus was later to tell him) is much concerned with poetry, but not specifically with Latin poetry. Archias, of course, composed in Greek. Ennius, *noster ille Ennius*, is mentioned thrice, Accius once, but only as germane to the discourse.<sup>19</sup>

Now take 56-54. The *Pro Sestio* of February or March 56 quotes the *oderint dum metuant* passage from Accius' *Atreus*, and a section on theatre demonstrations, apologetically introduced, naturally cites the relevant passages from the plays concerned, not without a complimentary reference to Accius, whom Cicero could remember personally.<sup>20</sup> Accius is also quoted and complimented in the *Pro Plancio*<sup>21</sup> of 55 or 54. The opening lines of Ennius' *Medea* (the most often quoted passage in Cicero) embellish the defence of Caelius; another part of that

<sup>14</sup>*Laws* 1. 5 ff.

<sup>15</sup>As was recognized by W. Zillinger (*Cicero und die altrömischen Dichter* [diss. Würzburg, 1911, pp. 67 ff.]), who, however, merely associates the phenomenon with the delight in quotation displayed in the contemporary *De oratore*.

<sup>16</sup>Quint. 1. 8. 11.

<sup>17</sup>The passage is cited at greater length in two later letters.

<sup>18</sup>*Mur.* 30, 60.

<sup>19</sup>*Arch.* 18, 22, 27.

<sup>20</sup>*Sest.* 102, 117-23, 126.

<sup>21</sup>*Planc.* 59.

speech has several citations from Roman comedy (one of them perhaps five lines long), with the Terentian cliché *hinc illae lacrimae* later to follow.<sup>22</sup> The speech *On the consular provinces* has no quotations, but does contain a reference to Ennius as *summus poeta*.<sup>23</sup> *De haruspicum responsis* has theatrical allusions in § 39. Ennius (*summus ille poeta noster*) is twice quoted in the defence of Balbus<sup>24</sup> and twice in that of Rabirius Postumus,<sup>25</sup> since *poeta ille noster* in § 28 is surely he. Ennius, Accius, and Plautus come under contribution in different parts of *In Pisonem*<sup>26</sup> and a tragedian unnamed in the fragmentary defence of Scaurus.<sup>27</sup> Only the short *Testimony against Vatinius* of 56 lacks all poetical reference; but a letter<sup>28</sup> reveals that the defence of Vatinius in the same year used a scene in Terence's *Eunuch* to illustrate the orator's situation vis-à-vis the optimates. The six verses in the letter had presumably been recited in court.

After 54 Cicero's urge to quote in public seems to have flagged, or perhaps the nature of the speeches partly accounts for the falling off. The defence of Milo offers nothing in this way, the three *Caesarianae* only a single line from an unknown tragedy.<sup>29</sup> The *Philippics* are mostly barren: the first has Accius' *oderint dum metuant* again; the second two scraps, one from Naevius (*poeta nescioquis*) and the names of Phormio, Gnatho, and Ballio as typical rascals; the thirteenth another half-line of unknown origin and a phrase adapted from Lucilius.<sup>30</sup>

In 56-55 Cicero wrote his three Books *On the orator*, first in the series of tracts on rhetoric and philosophy which continued almost to the end of his life, interrupted only by the Proconsulate and the Civil War. Like nearly all of them, it abounds in citations from Latin poetry. As in his speeches, he felt himself precluded from quoting Greek authors in the original, though they sometimes appear in his own translations. The practice of poetic quotation was endemic in Cicero's Greek sources; Chrysippus especially indulged in it *ad nauseam*.<sup>31</sup> But for Cicero it served not only as literary seasoning but also to air his

---

<sup>22</sup> *Cael.* 18, 36-38, 61.

<sup>23</sup> *Prov. cons.* 20.

<sup>24</sup> *Balb.* 36, 51.

<sup>25</sup> *Rab. Post.* 28, 29.

<sup>26</sup> *Pis.* 43, 61, 82.

<sup>27</sup> *Scaur.* 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Fam.* 1. 9. 19.

<sup>29</sup> *Deiot.* 25.

<sup>30</sup> *Phil.* 1. 34; 2. 65, 104, 15; 13. 49, 15.

<sup>31</sup> *Diog. Laert.* 7. 18. 1.

enthusiasm for the good old writers whom Euphorion's disciples scorned. The quotations in *De oratore* amount to almost 50, a number exceeded only in the *Tusculans*.

In his extant letters, which in total volume almost equal the *rhētorica* and the *philosophica* combined, Cicero was not inhibited from quoting Greek, at least to certain correspondents, including Atticus and his brother. The three Books of letters to the latter, dating from 59 to 54, contain ten or eleven quotations from Greek poets, most of them from Homer, and only one from Latin, to which may be added an allusion to Lucilius.<sup>32</sup> Greek quotations also predominate in the Atticus correspondence, but some thirty from Latin are scattered among its sixteen Books. *Ad familiares* has about as many. Among the "friends" Trebatius Testa and Papirius Paetus get five apiece. Paetus is the only correspondent to produce quotations of his own, from a tragedy of Accius and a comedy of Trabea, except for a line of Pacuvius put in by Caelius Rufus. The letters to Marcus Brutus of 43 contain a line from Plautus' *Trinummus* and another from an unknown play, the latter already quoted to Atticus many years previously.

The quotations in the Letters presumably came spontaneously from memory and should offer the most significant pointer to Cicero's taste and knowledge in this field. About one in five occur more than once in the letters and about one in four occur also in the published works. Thus about half the total are demonstrated as tags firmly rooted in Cicero's mind. The most favored authors are Ennius (especially *Annals* and *Medea*) and Terence, though two of the latter's six plays, *Adelphi* (!) and *Hecyra* are unrepresented. Lucilius, Naevius, and Accius are sparse, and a single quotation apiece represents Pacuvius, Plautus, Caecilius, Trabea, Turpilius, Afranius, and Atilius. However, some fifteen of uncertain origin without doubt come mostly from one or other of the three tragedians.

Reverting now to the speeches and treatises, we find Ennius again far out in the lead with, on a rough reckoning exclusive of repeats,<sup>33</sup> 32 citations from the *Annals*, 65 from tragedies, and six from other works. Of 43 to be ascribed with more or less assurance to particular plays, ten come from *Medea*, which thus keeps pride of place; but *Thyestes*, *Andromache*, and *Alcmaeon* score between five and eight. At least eight

---

<sup>32</sup>*Q. fr.* 3. 4. 2.

<sup>33</sup>The statistics were compiled independently, but may be compared with the data in Zillinger (see above, note 15). They are presented as indicative of Cicero's taste and range, not as absolute, which no such statistics well could be, given the many uncertainties of attribution and other variables.

more are represented in the assigned fragments. Pacuvius and Accius follow with 22 and 30 citations respectively and eight or nine assignable plays apiece, the latter's *Atreus*, with perhaps ten citations, being a particular favorite. Naevius crops up occasionally, once in the second *Philippic*, twice in the *Orator*, once in *De senectute* (the play is named, *The wolf*), and with the well-worn *laetus sum laudari me abs te, pater, a laudato viro* in the *Tusculans*.<sup>34</sup> Upwards of 50 fragments of doubtful authorship are nearly all from tragedy. In comedy, Terence, commended to Atticus for the elegance of his Latin, remains an easy favorite with 23 citations from five plays; but *Adelphi* scores only three, *Hecyra*, as in the letters, zero. One verse cited as from Terence in the tract *On the nature of the gods* is not to be found in our texts — presumably a lapse of memory on Cicero's part. Caecilius can boast thirteen fragments, three of them from his *Young comrades* (*Synephebi*). Plautus, on the other hand, fares no better, proportionately, than in the letters; three out of four citations come from *Trinummus* (one of them in the *De inventione*, but found also in *Ad Herennium*), one from *Aulularia*. Quotations from the smaller comic fry are very scarce; Afranius and Trabea have two each, Turpilius one. Atellan farce is represented by two examples from Novius in *De oratore*. Lucilius comes out strongly with fifteen. The only non-dramatic citation, apart from Ennius and Lucilius, is of an epigram by the elder Catulus.

Passing to Cicero's personal comments, one has to own that these do not amount to very much. In the *Brutus* and elsewhere he shows himself an expert and perspicacious critic of his fellow-orators, and his sketch of Roman historiography in the *Laws* is sufficiently incisive and discriminating. But he nowhere takes a similarly comprehensive look at the poets, and what he says of them individually rarely goes beyond banalities. In his speeches Ennius is favored with the titles *summus poeta* and *ingeniosus poeta*, as we have seen, and in the *Tusculans*<sup>35</sup> Cicero is moved at one point to exclaim *O poetam egregium!* and *Praeclarum carmen!* Accius too in the *Pro Sestio* is *summus poeta, gravis ille et ingeniosus poeta, doctissimus poeta*, whereas Pacuvius, least quoted of the three, is merely *bonus poeta*, in *De oratore*.<sup>36</sup> So it comes as something of a surprise that the little work *De optimo genere oratorum* (§ 2) gives Pacuvius primacy among Roman tragedians, though so far as Ennius is concerned that may have been because *he* had already been awarded the prize for epic. The same passage puts Caecilius first for comedy (but with a "perhaps"), despite the poor latinity of which he

<sup>34</sup> *Tusc.* 4. 67; cf. *Fam.* 5. 12. 7; 15. 6. 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Tusc.* 3. 45 ff.

stands accused in a letter to Atticus, by contrast with the purity of Terence's.<sup>37</sup> Horace's judgments in his *Epistle to Augustus* will be recalled. It is of interest to compare the earlier comic canon of Volca-cius Sedigitus. There too Caecilius comes first out of ten, but Plautus is second, with an easy lead over the rest of the field. The obscure Licinius comes third, Naevius fourth ("when he warms up," if my conjecture *cum feruet*<sup>38</sup> is admitted), followed by Atilius, Terence, Tur-pilius, Trabea, Luscius, and, "for antiquity's sake," Ennius. The strik-ing difference, of course, is Cicero's relative neglect of Plautus (recog-nized by the omission of his name in the passage of Quintilian referred to above)<sup>39</sup> and his cultivation of Terence, though this may merely reflect a current tendency. As the first century B.C. wore on, Roman schoolmasters would be likely to favor Terence for the quality on which Cicero remarks, the elegance of his diction. And that, I suppose, is why we have Terence complete, while four of his five superiors on Vol-cacius' list are no more. Of *dimidiate Menander* I say nothing, since the authorship of that celebrated appraisal seems to remain in doubt. As for Lucilius, Cicero commends his wit in the same terms as Horace — *urbanitas, sal, facete*. The complimentary epithet *doctus*, however, is qualified in another place by the remark that Lucilius' writings are "of a lighter sort," *ut urbanitas summa appareat, doctrina mediocris*.<sup>40</sup>

Of greater interest are a few scattered observations on lesser names, such as the criticism of Livius Andronicus in the *Brutus*.<sup>41</sup> "The Latin *Odyssey* resembles a work of Daedalus, and Livius' plays are not worth a second reading." That is in line with Ennius' contempt for Saturnians, though Naevius in the same passage gets kinder treat-ment:<sup>42</sup> his *Punica* is like a sculpture by Myron (i.e. it stands some-where between the primitive and the mature) and, granted that Ennius is the more finished craftsman, he ought not to have affected to despise an author for whom his practice demonstrated some respect. Also in the *Brutus*<sup>43</sup> Afranius is noticed as "a very clever fellow" (*homo perar-gutus*), "even eloquent — as a playwright." Atilius, ranked by Volca-cius immediately above Terence, is severely handled. The only

<sup>36</sup> *De orat.* 2. 187.

<sup>37</sup> *Att.* 7. 3. 10.

<sup>38</sup> See "Notes on Minor Latin Poetry," *Phoenix* 32 (1978), p. 305.

<sup>39</sup> See above, note 16.

<sup>40</sup> *Fin.* 1. 7.

<sup>41</sup> *Brut.* 71.

<sup>42</sup> *Brut.* 75-76.

<sup>43</sup> *Brut.* 167.

quotation, in a letter to Atticus,<sup>44</sup> is followed by the comment: "Not very neat — the writer is Atilius, a very harsh versifier (*poeta durissimus*).” Exactly what Cicero found amiss in the offending iambic tetrameter is uncertain, but *durissimus* will refer, at least primarily, to technique, as does in my opinion *durior* in Quintilian’s famous pronouncement on Cornelius Gallus. In *De finibus*<sup>45</sup> Atilius’ version of Sophocles’ *Electra* is adduced as an example of poor work, with the added information that Licinius (Licinus?) called him *ferreus scriptor*. And yet, Cicero adds, he should be read, “for to be unread in our native poets is to be scandalously lazy or else daintily supercilious.”

A search in Cicero’s works for *obiter dicta* on early Latin poetry in general is seldom rewarding, but there is interest, and consolation, in the remark (in the *Orator*<sup>46</sup>) that the rhythm in comic senarii is sometimes barely perceptible. So the schoolboys of Westminster performing Terence as prose might have had Cicero’s indulgence, if not his blessing.

Himself a translator from Greek originals, Cicero might be expected to comment at some point on this aspect of Roman verse, dramatic verse at least. In fact he has left two statements on the subject, so contradictory<sup>47</sup> as to raise doubts about the quality of thought and degree of attention he spared for such matters. In his *Academic questions*<sup>48</sup> he says that Ennius and his successors reproduced the import of their models, not the words: *non verba sed vim Graecorum*. Yet in *De finibus*,<sup>49</sup> written the same year, they are described as word for word translators (*fabellas ad verbum e Graecis expressas*). In both passages Cicero says what it suits his argument to say; but in one of them, that is in *De finibus*, he is wrong.<sup>50</sup> The Latin tragedies were not literal translations; that much is clear from the survivals.

The Romans, we read in the *Tusculans*,<sup>51</sup> had been slow to recognize the importance of poetry, and Roman poetry had been held back thereby; but its luminaries were no unworthy match for the glorious

<sup>44</sup> *Att.* 14. 20. 3.

<sup>45</sup> *Fin.* 1. 5.

<sup>46</sup> *Orat.* 184.

<sup>47</sup> See G. D’Anna, “Fabellae Latinae ad verbum e Graecis expressae,” *Rivista di Cultura Classica e Medioevale* 7 (1965), pp. 364-83.

<sup>48</sup> *Acad.* 1. 10.

<sup>49</sup> *Fin.* 1. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Even allowing for an element of exaggeration in the phrase *ad verbum expressas*; cf. Ter. *Ad.* 10-11 *eum hic locum sumpsit sibi / in Adelphos, verbum de verbo expressum extulit.*

<sup>51</sup> *Tusc.* 1. 3.

Greeks. How assiduously did Cicero read their works? He was at any rate a frequent and knowledgeable play-goer, highly sensitive to the popular demonstrations which often met celebrities like himself as they entered the theatre. A precious passage in a letter to Atticus<sup>52</sup> of 54 illustrates:

I returned to Rome on 9 July and went to the theatre. To begin with, the applause was loud and steady as I entered — but never mind that, I am a fool to mention it. To proceed, I saw Antipho, who had been given his freedom before they put him on stage. Not to keep you too long in suspense, he won the prize; but never have I seen such a weedy little object, not a scrap of voice, not a — but never say I say so! As Andromache at least he stood head and shoulders above Astyanax! ...Now you'll want to know about *Arbuscula*: first-rate!<sup>53</sup>

But for most of his life Cicero was a very busy man, and there is small likelihood and no evidence that such time as he had left for reading was largely spent on the Latin poets. He had other fish to fry.

Then there is the wider question of Cicero's response to poetry as such. Everyone will think of the purple patch in *Pro Archia*.<sup>54</sup>

Rightly, then, did our great Ennius call poets "holy," for they seem recommended to us by the benign bestowal of God. Holy then, gentlemen, in your enlightened eyes let the name of poet be, inviolate hitherto by the most benighted of races! The very rocks of the wilderness give back a sympathetic echo to the voice; savage beasts have sometimes been charmed into stillness by song; and shall we, who are nurtured upon all that is highest, be deaf to the appeal of poetry?

Eloquent, certainly, but not very revealing. The speech dilates on the moral and recreational value of poetry, but much more on its capacity to immortalize famous men. It tells us nothing directly about Cicero's aesthetic sensibilities. But Seneca has preserved his derogatory opinion of the Greek lyricists; and there is a significance not to be overlooked in his admiration for his client's talent for improvising:

...how often, I say, have I seen him, without writing a single letter, extemporizing quantities of excellent verse dealing with current topics! How often have I seen him, when recalled, repeat his original

<sup>52</sup> *Att.* 4. 15. 6.

<sup>53</sup> Some things do not change. Horace Walpole wrote to Sir Horace Mann of an eighteenth-century Antipho (*Letters of Horace Walpole*, ed. P. Cunningham [London 1857-59], 1, p. 168): "His acting I have seen, and may say to you, who will not tell it again here, I see nothing wonderful in it; but it is heresy to say so."

<sup>54</sup> *Pro Archia Poeta* 18 ff. (tr. N. H. Watts [London 1923]).

matter with an entire change of word and phrase!<sup>55</sup>

One almost expects to be told that he did it standing on one leg. Horace would not have applauded these exhibitions; neither, I fancy, would Catullus. True, Cicero was addressing a jury less literary than himself. But the president of the court was his brother, who later turned out Latin versions of four Sophoclean tragedies in sixteen days during a quiet spell in Gaul.<sup>56</sup> Cicero approved.

Poets, says the *Pro Archia*, should, according to the best authorities, be considered "holy" because, unlike other artists, who depend on knowledge, rules, and technique, the poet's power comes from Nature and a kind of divine inspiration. Similarly in *De oratore*.<sup>57</sup> "I have often heard (and they say Democritus and Plato have left it in their writings) that no good poet can come into being without a kindling of spirit and an afflatus of something akin to frenzy." This somewhat one-sided view is suggestive, not in itself, but as showing what Cicero's abstract pronouncements show so often, a victory of acquired doctrine over personal experience. Archias' displays were poetry, at least for Cicero. Were *they* a product of nature and Platonic frenzy? Were his own *Aratea*? It would seem that he never thought about poetry carefully enough to ask such questions. I do not think G. B. Townend is quite correct when he says:<sup>58</sup> "Ultimately it must be recognized, as Cicero himself did in moments of depression, simply that he lacked inspiration." Townend was thinking, I imagine, of Cicero's excuse in a letter to his brother, who was urging him to verse composition; *abest ἐνθουσιασμός*. All Cicero meant by that was that he was too busy and bothered at that particular time to develop this *sine qua non*. But whether he knew it or not, he *did* lack inspiration, *all* the time. And it failed to excite him in contemporary genius: blind to Catullus, purblind to Lucretius. As for the old masters, his enjoyment of a bravura passage like Ennius' *o pater, o patria, o Priami domus!* was surely genuine; and it is to Cicero that we owe the preservation of a large proportion of their surviving lines. For that let us be duly thankful, even while we discern an ironic possibility that it was less patriotic pride or literary pleasure than the potent impulse of punctured self-esteem which made him their champion.

Harvard University

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>56</sup> *Q. fr.* 3. 5. 7 (3. 6).

<sup>57</sup> *De orat.* 2. 194; cf. *Tusc.* 1. 6. 4.

<sup>58</sup> In *Cicero* (ed. T. A. Dorey, [London 1965]), p. 123.

