THE INTRODUCTION OF EPIC IN ROME: CULTURAL THEFTS AND SOCIAL CONTESTS

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> Luego, los ricos y los poderosos se apoderaron de las palabras importantes porque representaban las cosas que querían, las cosas importantes.

> Afterwards, the rich and powerful took possession of the important words because they represented the things they wanted, the important things.
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> Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, *El señor de los bonsáis*

Ennius opened his *Annales* by invoking the Muses: "Musae quae pedibus magnum pulsatis Olympum," "Muses, who with your feet beat great Olympus" (*Ann.* 1). In his magisterial edition of the poem, Otto Skutsch comments on this line as follows (1985.144):

> The poet invokes the Muses instead of the *Camenae*, to whom Livius Andronicus in his translation of the *Odyssey* and apparently Naevius in the *Carmen Belli Punici* had addressed themselves. He [Ennius] thus expressed his intention to subject Roman poetry to the discipline of Greek poetic form. As the *Camenae*, who may owe their connection with poetry to an etymology linking their name to *carmen*, are replaced by the Muses, so *carmen* is replaced by *poema* (12), *uates* by *poeta* (3), and the Saturnian line by the hexameter (206–7). The beginning of the reign of the Muses in Roman poetry coincides, hardly by accident, with their introduction into the cult of Rome

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> by Ennius' patron M. Fulvius Nobilior, probably not, as
> often assumed, in 187 B.C., the year of his triumph over
> the Aetolians, but in 179, the year of his censorship.

Skutsch's remarks are built upon two discourses. The first involves the failure of Ennius's predecessors to submit Roman poetry to the aesthetic standards set by the Greek epic tradition; the second implies that Ennius's success in doing so went hand in hand with M. Fulvius Nobilior's decision to build a new temple dedicated to the Muses.[1] Implicated in the first discourse is the understanding that *carmen*, *uates*, and the Saturnian are signifiers of a more primitive (Roman) civilization, whereas *poema*, *poeta,* and the hexameter stand for a more refined (Greek) sensibility. The second discourse obscures the fact that Fulvius's temple hosted statues of the Muses plundered from Ambracia and reinforces the first by suggesting that Fulvius's collaboration with Ennius constituted a turning point in the process of Rome's surrender to the cultural power of Greece.

In recent years, the teleological trajectory embedded in Skutsch's comments has been at the center of an intense scholarly debate. Some have traced how this trajectory is reconstructed and corroborated by later authors (Hinds 1998.52–74). Others emphasize that, with the *Annales,* Rome witnessed the final establishment of an epic genre focused on the celebration of national exploits and a new type of socio-cultural partnership between poets and rulers.[2] Still others turn their attention to broader cultural events such as a shift in acculturation practices, the professionalization of culture, and the emergence of a literature in Latin more generally. According to this view, literary epic is to be linked to the textually undocumented *carmina convivalia* that Cato the Censor evoked in his *Origines*, but whether this link was one of continuity in change or one of crisis and resolution remains a contested issue.[3] Taken together, these recent discussions make it necessary to sharpen our methodological tools and to plumb more deeply the intricate process that led to the formation of an epic tradition in Rome.

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1 For Fulvius's temple, see Cic. *Arch.* 27, Eum. *Pan. Lat.* 9.7.3 Baehrens, Servius at *Aen.* 1.8.

2 E.g., Goldberg 1995.123 and passim, Citroni 1995.31–37, Gruen 1990.106–22.

3 Habinek 1998a.34–39 (more generally) and Rüpke 2000 and 2001 (focusing more specifically on epic). The question of the *carmina convivalia* has been revived by Zorzetti 1990 and 1991. As for Cato the Censor's evocation of the *carmina convivalia*, see Cic. *Tusc.*1.3, 4.3, *Brut.* 75.

Starting from the assumption that we cannot simply accept the notion that the Romans suddenly fell under the spell of a superior Greek culture, it might be worthwhile to review the evidence that we have at our disposal.[4] First of all, the archeological record demonstrates that, just like the Etruscans and other Italic populations, the Romans were greatly affected by Greek culture starting in the late eighth century B.C.E.[5] In the course of the third century B.C.E., however, Rome's relations with the Greek speaking world shifted in new directions under the push of her expansion into Italy and Sicily. Manifestations of this shift included the development of coinage, the importation of Greek cults, the use of Greek cognomina, and the embracing of Hellenistic practices more generally. By the end of the century, the increased concentration of material, human, and cultural commodities in the city, and in the hands of her most powerful citizens, allowed Rome to become an imperial capital looming over the rest of the Italian urban centers.[6] The establishment of a poetic tradition is to be viewed as an offshoot of this larger socio-cultural trend.

According to Cicero, poetry entered Rome in the guise of drama the year following the first capitulation of Carthage, when Livius Andronicus translated and staged a Greek-made play at the *Ludi Romani*.[7] This is not to say that Rome knew no dramatic traditions before then, but Cicero and other later commentators felt that poetic drama in Latin was itself new.[8]

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4 It should be noted that this notion continues to crop up, sometimes in very elaborate ways. So, for example, Glenn Most has recently remarked that "the Romans recognized themselves from the beginning as latecomers in the highly competitive cultural market-place of the Hellenistic Mediterranean, and seem to have decided early on that a program of intensive translation was the best strategy for catching up; . . . in the absence of a Ministry of Culture, the decisions involved were individual, unsystematic, and largely the work of poets" (2003.388). Martin Hose 1999, on the other hand, describes the establishment of a literary tradition in Rome as a two-phase process: first, the Greeks culturally colonized the Romans; afterwards, the Romans engaged in a long struggle for cultural emancipation. Though seemingly different, both views are built upon the belief that Greek culture was inherently superior and that the Romans had to work long and hard to overcome their cultural inferiority and subordination.

5 Cf. Cornell 1995.81–118, Peruzzi 1998.

6 Cf. Gruen 1990.158–62, 1992.227–31; Cornell 1995.390–98; David 1997.35–53.

7 Cic. *Brut.* 72–73. In this passage, Cicero disparages Accius's chronology by which Livius Andronicus staged the first play at the *Ludi Iuventutis* in 197 B.C.E. after arriving as a slave in 209 B.C.E. (see discussion in Gruen 1990.81–83). Cf. also Cic. *Sen.* 50, *Tusc.* 1.3, Gellius 17.21.42. For the reference to the *Ludi Romani*, see Cassiodorus *Chron. ad Ann.* 239. This last testimony talks about the production of both comedy and tragedy.

8 See also Livy 7.2. While referring to the pre-existence of other dramatic traditions, Livy points to Livius Andronicus as the initiator of a clearly distinguished dramatic form.

There is no testimony to tell us how the audience reacted to this performance, nor do we have textual remains of this play. Nevertheless, there is plenty of evidence to attest that poetic drama soon became an essential element in the ever increasing number of public festivals, celebrations of military victories, temple dedications, and funeral games.[9] Accordingly, locked into civic rituals orchestrated by those who engineered Rome's territorial expansion, poetic drama came to serve as a ceremonial accessory that expanded the religious celebration of Rome's successes and her rulers. What all of this implies as well is that the relationship between poetic practices and military conquest soon became more intricate and pervasive.

At least at the beginning, those who practiced poetry in Rome were not members of the ruling elite; more often than not, they were individuals relocated from abroad. The sources suggest that some of the poets came to the city as prisoners of war (Livius Andronicus, Caecilius Statius, and Terence),[10] whereas others were recruited by individual members of the elite (Ennius).[11] Only Plautus and Naevius seem to have migrated to Rome of their own accord, possibly for the opportunity of employment that the city offered.[12] Once in the city, the main job of the poets was to translate literary materials produced in the Greek speaking world for Roman consumption. As such, poetry in the context of late third and early second century B.C.E. Rome was doubly "performative": it was not only a cultural invention based on the reprocessing of cultural expressions belonging to non-Romans, it was also the means whereby its non-elite and alien inventors made a living in their new home. In other words, the poets engaged in much more than purely aesthetic acts of translation, and the civic celebrations that hosted poetic performances soon became institutional contexts wherein the cultural heritage of the Greeks was acknowledged in a way that defended and upheld the growing hegemony of the Roman ruling elite. In the process, the poets who performed this cultural relocation tried to carve out for themselves a space next to this elite by capitalizing on their transformational skills.[13] A few of

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 9 Taylor 1937.285–91, but see also Gruen 1990.84.

10 For Livius Andronicus taken captive, we have the indirect reference in Cicero (*Brut*. 72–73) to Accius's *Didascalica*. Although Accius's chronology may be off (he places the arrival of Livius in 209 B.C.E.), the narrative paradigm is what interests me. For Caecilius, see Gellius 4.20.13. For Terence, see Nepos *Ter*. 1.

11 For Ennius, see Nepos *Cato* 1.4.

12 For Plautus, see Plaut. *Most*. 769–70 (though, admittedly, these lines refer solely to Plautus's Umbrian origins); for Naevius, see Gellius 1.24.2.

13 See Plaut. *Trin*.18–19, *Asin*. 11, *Merc*. 9–10.

them, however, did not limit themselves to reprocessing Greek drama, they also explored the possibilities inherent in the Greek epic tradition.

This paper proposes a performance-oriented framework in order to reflect on the socio-cultural effects of poetic explorations of Greek epic in Rome. Within this framework, I pinpoint how, by reenacting their scripts, the early epic poets mediated a most crucial change of cultural ownership that benefited their elite sponsors and yet impinged on practices and rituals that had long regulated the intra-elite distribution of prestige and the reproduction of the ruling class.

LIVIUS ANDRONICUS AND NAEVIUS: PIONEERS OF ROMAN EPIC

The first line of Livius Andronicus's translation of epic reads as follows: "Virum mihi, Camena / insece versutum." Commenting on this line, Stephen Hinds notes (1998.61–62):

> "Tell me, *Camena*, of the man who was *versutus*." *Versutus* "characterized by turns" like the Greek πολύτροπος; but in particular 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 πολυτροπία.

Hinds's remarks indicate how, in the opening line of his *Odussia,* Livius may have staked out a very self-conscious claim of poetic authorship.[14] It is equally important, however, to account for the strategies that Livius adopted to make his "turns of language" culturally and socially relevant. In this sense, it is crucial to acknowledge that, in this line, the poet announces

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14 Many have insisted on Livius's "faithfulness" to Homer in this line; e.g., Conte 1986.82–83, Goldberg 1995.64. As for when Livius translated the *Odyssey*, some critics think that it happened before he began to produce drama (see, for example, Hardie 1920.198), others afterwards (see Kaimio 1979.212).

the romanization of Homer's *Odyssey* by invoking a cultural signifier of pre-poetic song (the Camena). At the same time, he invites the invoked Camena to sing in Saturnians to and through him (*mihi*) about Ulysses and his own translated self (*virum . . . versutum*). But to appreciate the rippling effects of this strategy of self-presentation more fully, one must also consider the audience that Livius addressed and the type of socio-cultural work that his translation brought about. To this end, it may be useful to start by bringing into relief some similarities and differences between drama and epic from a performance perspective.

On one level, early Roman drama and epic were cultural expressions translated by non-elite and non-Roman individuals based on the manipula-tion of the different linguistic codes and song traditions belonging to each of these codes. On another level, what the poets produced were scripts that acquired cultural relevance through acts of performance. In other words, the significance of these scripted translations was not linked to the fact that they were written; rather, they acquired value only to the extent that they sustained an encounter with an audience. From a performance perspective, the social configuration of the audience, the place where these scripts were performed, and the number of performers involved distinguished drama from epic.

In the *de Grammaticis et Rhetoribus,* Suetonius indicates that both Livius Andronicus and Ennius engaged in exegetical translations from Greek texts and in exemplary readings from their Latin compositions in both private and public spaces (1.2). The specific nature of these settings remains unclear, and Suetonius's historical reliability is controversial (Kaster 1995.48–54). For Livius Andronicus, it has been posited that he used his translation of Homer for educational purposes in the household of his patron, Livius Sali-nator, and performed from his translation before a restricted audience in other, more public contexts.[15] Whatever the case may be, there is no doubt that some of the early poets engaged in exchanges with people belonging to the highest echelons of Roman society for purposes that went beyond the mere "marketing" of dramatic scripts for public celebrations. In this sense, one can say that Livius Andronicus displayed his ability to access the literary patrimony of the Greeks through solo performances based on

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15 Jerome *Chron. a. a.* 1830 (with reference also to the fact that, because he taught the sons of Salinator, he gained his freedom). As for (nationalistic) purposes that went beyond teaching, see Gruen 1990.84–85.

his scripted translation of the *Odyssey*. At the same time, he showed his privileged listeners how to use translations to bolster their social, political, and cultural hegemony more directly. If so, the *Odussia* allowed its author to occupy a position in relation to his elite audience somewhat comparable to that of later poets.

Horace asserts that, when young, he had to learn by heart and recite Livius's *Odussia* under the direction of a *grammaticus*, a person of lower rank momentarily in an authoritative position in relation to the pupil (Hor. *Epist*. 2.1.71–73 Brink):

> Non equidem insector delendave carmina Livi
> esse reor, memini quae plagosum mihi parvo
> Orbilium dictare.
>
> I am not in hostile pursuit of Livius's songs and think that
> they must be destroyed. These I remember Orbilius used
> to dictate to me when a boy with his rod.[16]

Encoded in these lines is Horace's attempt to demonstrate his superiority over Orbilius, who was a well-known interpreter of archaic Latin poetry (Suet. *Gramm*. 8–9). He takes a condescending attitude towards the poetic skills of Livius Andronicus by using *insector* to flaunt, through the choice of the verb, his thorough understanding of the older poet's use of *insece* in the first line of the *Odussia*.[17] What Horace seems to be doing, in other words, is challenging the "aura" attached to early poetic crafts in order to outwit those like Orbilius who judged or taught poetry but did not produce poetry themselves.[18] At the same time, he obliquely claims that the early epic poets (beginning with Livius Andronicus) were responsible for the circulation of their own written crafts in performance and for encouraging their elite audience to appropriate Greek literary materials either by performing from their scripts or by engaging in translation practices themselves.[19]

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16 All translations are my own.
17 This is acutely noted by Hinds 1998.71 and n. 37.
18 The term "aura" was coined by Walter Benjamin (1969.220–21) in relation to the unique existence of a work of art within a particular context and to the history that it accumulates over time.
19 Elite translation activities are indirectly implied by the accusations laid against Terence about the authorship of his plays. See Ter. *Ad*. 15–19, *Heaut*. 22–26.

In this respect, it is quite significant that when Horace discusses in the *Ars Poetica* the shortcomings of the "faithful translator" and the right way to go about translating, he also offers his own version of the *Odyssey*'s opening lines (Hor. *Epist*. 2.3.141–42 Brink):

> Dic mihi, Musa, uirum captae post tempora Troiae
> qui mores hominum multorum uidit et urbes.

> Tell me, Muse, of the man who, after the conquest of
>   Troy,
> saw the customs and the cities of many men.

Although fulfilling an explanatory function, these lines are also a corrective commentary on Livius's translation. When set next to Livius's words, Horace's non-translation of πολύτροπος most clearly reveals the later poet's attempt to reinforce his own poetic voice by debunking the self-referential way in which the older poet spoke about the project of translation that he had inaugurated. Finally, Horace's invocation of the Muse and his use of the hexameter most crucially encode the history of bloody conquest and cultural fascination that sustained other translations from Greece, including his own.[20]

    Viewed in this way, Horace's didactic poetry about poetry looks back to Livius Andronicus's successful intrusion into the cultural consciousness of the Roman elite and into their cultural practices.[21] But to understand why Livius succeeded in this endeavor, we must resist the aestheticizing and teleological paradigm within which Horace couches his own account of Roman poetry in his *Letter to Augustus* (Hor. *Epist*. 2.1.156–58 Brink):

> Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes
> intulit agresti Latio; sic horridus ille
> defluxit numerus saturnius.

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20 Brink 1963–82.2.143–44 points out that the comment that follows, that a translator must "shed light out of smoke, rather than smoke from radiance," alludes to the proverb "where there is smoke, there is fire" and is often used in war scenes by Livy. If so, this would reinforce my argument as to the underlying relationship between military conquest and poetic translations. As for Horace's own translating project, as Feeney 2002 points out, the poet never ventures to discuss Greek lyric.

21 Note how in his *Letter to Augustus,* Horace will assert that "Rome possesses and enumerates these poets beginning with the time of Livius, the writer, to our days" ("habet hos numeratque poetas / ad nostrum tempus Liui scriptoris ab aeuo," *Epist*. 2.1.61–62).

> Conquered Greece conquered the fierce victor in turn
> and introduced the arts into rustic Latium; and it was in
>   this way
> that the uncouth Saturnian verse ran dry.

Moreover, we need to reflect more deeply on the self-referentiality inherent in the adjective *versutus*. In fact, if by choosing *versutus* Livius "troped" his linguistic versatility into Odysseus's πολυτροπία, it is also true that he "troped" Odysseus's mythological cunning back onto himself. In other words, Livius transformed the Homeric material into an instrument with which to express his selfhood, but he also responded more directly to the urge of his elite audience to express their political and military ascendancy through the romanization of Greek literature. In a way, then, Livius exploited the same power that Plautus's clever slave exercises during his interactions with the other characters on stage, when he uses their stereotypical characteristics to carry out his schemes for the benefit of his young master.[22] But 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.[23] Further confirmation of this fact can be drawn from Livius Andronicus's very decision to transform the Homeric hexameter into Saturnian cola.

Although the origins and the nature of the Saturnian are still objects of scholarly debate, there are clear indications that, "before poetry" and for some time afterwards, its rhythm was more or less explicitly linked to the dominant members of Roman society.[24] In fact, the Saturnian rhythm accommodates *dicta* and ritual songs performed by aristocrats as well as

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22 Slater 1985.16–17 uses the notion of "improvisation" developed by Greenblatt 1980 to underscore the versatility of the clever slave. But the clever slave is also the character through whom Plautus speaks of himself as a poet; accordingly, this versatility is not restricted to the character himself, but is purposefully extended to his creator (see Plaut. *Pseud.* 401–05 and comments in Fitzgerald 2000.44–46). The socio-cultural effects of this manipulation, however, are different because drama and epic differed in relation to the context of performance and the modes of performance.

23 Schechner 2002.35 aptly points out that "in 'make-believe' performances, the distinction between what's real and what's pretended is kept clear" and opposes it to "make-belief" performances of everyday life, since they "create the very social reality that they enact."

24 For a recent reassessment of the Saturnian, see Mercado 2003 based on Parsons 1999 (thanks to Jed Parsons for pointing out to me Mercado's recent publication).

compositions preserved in writing that represented the achievements and the moral qualities of individual members of the ruling elite inside tombs and in other more public contexts.[25] If we are willing to acknowledge this link, then Livius's translation bears the signs of a cultural operation that goes much beyond the mere transformation of a text written in one language into a text in another. In fact, what Livius did was to graft the contents of a text in which the whole Greek speaking world recognized itself onto a song rhythm that signified the cultural hegemony of those who held political and social power in Rome. Accordingly, by translating the *Odyssey* and by performing from his translation, Livius transferred one of the most inalienable possessions of the Greeks into a long-standing and exclusive cultural repertoire belonging to the Romans. At the same time, he opened the way for the encroachment of poets, poetic crafts, and translation practices on more exclusive sites of social interaction.

Looked at in this way, the *Odussia* points to the poets as active agents situated on a critical cosmological threshold between two distinct sites located on a geographical axis (the "here" and the "out there") and two other equally distinct sites located on a temporal axis (the "now" and the "back then").[26] While the liminal status of the *Odussia* confirms the position that poets occupied in the Roman social landscape, the transformative potency intrinsic in poetic craftsmanship appears multiplied by an overlap between the geographical "out there" and the temporal "back then." Accordingly, Livius's epic craft allowed the audience located in the "here and now" to enter into contact with their own "back then" just as with any other song performed in the rhythm of the Saturnian. This "back then," however, was now enhanced by a cultural good relocated from the "out there." Therefore, Livius's translation of Homer's *Odyssey* came to mark an important turning point because it showed his elite audience how to expand their ideological legitimacy by drawing simultaneously from two distinct cosmological places located outside the "here and now." In this respect, it is again significant that when introducing his treatment of poetry to Augustus, Horace suggests

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25 See Appius Claudius's *dicta* (pp. 5–6 Morel), the *Carmen Saliare* and the *Carmen Arvale*, the Scipionic *elogia* (*CIL* 1.29–30, *CIL* 1.32, *CIL* 1.33, *CIL* 1.34), the *elogium* of Atilius Calatinus (p. 7 Morel), the *tabulae triumphales* of Acilius Glabrio and L. Aemilius Regillus (*GL* 6.265 Keil), and the inscription located in the temple of Hercules Victor in which the victory of L. Mummius at Corinth in 146 B.C.E. was commemorated (*CIL* 1.541).

26 For an anthropological view of the relationship between these geographical/temporal sites as places of origin and the center, see Helms 1993.

that the Roman people valued only things coming from "far away lands or extinct by time" ("nisi quae terris semota suisque / temporibus defuncta," Hor. *Epist*. 2.1.21–22 Brink). On yet another level, Livius exploited for the benefit of his addressees the mythological link between Greece and Rome inherent in Odysseus's travels in the west, a link that the Greeks themselves had used to expand their own ideological legitimacy.[27]

In other words, if we give up the idea that the Romans were seduced by the cultural superiority of the Greeks, what emerges is a quite different type of cultural fascination. In one way, this fascination has to do with the anthropologically recognized fact that political and social potency relies on a continual effort "to capture someone else's inalienable possessions, to embrace someone else's ancestors, magic, power and transfer parts of these identities to the next generation" (Weiner 1992.48). In another way, one can concede that, just as in other traditional societies, so, too, in Rome, the "out there" and the "back then" were equal foci of energizing spirituality and legitimacy for the living members of society (Helms 1993.5 and passim). Accordingly, skilled crafting and acquisition of goods located outside the center (either geographically or temporally) constituted a "package" of comparable activities. Poetic craftsmanship was distinct from and yet involved in the long-distance acquisitions that the Roman elite were now pursuing by war, and, from war, poetic craftsmanship drew force and meaning. This is because, like war, poetry required a significant exertion that bestowed social prestige as well as cosmological legitimacy on its practitioners and its sponsors.

Naevius constructed his *Bellum Poenicum* upon Livius's translation of the *Odyssey*. In this poem, he portrayed the military achievements of the Roman rulers within a mythological framework translated from Greece. The remains of Naevius's epic are extremely scanty, but we do know that, just like Livius Andronicus, he managed to introduce into his poem a few (or more?) self-referential lines. Indeed, if we are to believe Aulus Gellius, Naevius spoke about his own participation in the very war that he sought to represent (Gellius 17.21.45): "Cn. Naevius . . . quem M. Varro . . . stipendia fecisse ait bello poenico primo, idque ipsum Naevium dicere in eo carmine quod de eodem bello scripsit," "Gnaeus Naevius . . . Varro says

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27 For Livius's choice of the *Odyssey*, see Goldberg 1995.50–51, Gruen 1990.85, Gentili 1979.100. For Roman interests in the Trojan saga, see also Gruen 1992.6–51. As for Greek accounts of the Greek origins of Rome and other cities in the Italian peninsula, see Hellanicus *FGrH* 4F 84, Dionysius of Halicarnassus 1.72.2 and 5.

that he served in the First Punic War, and that Naevius himself said this in that poem that he wrote about the same war."

In the last decade or so, critics have used this testimony to underscore the fact that the *Bellum Poenicum* knew no patrons and that the poet took pride in the achievements of the Roman generals. This reading is prompted by an attempt to rescue Naevius from the accusation that he had supported the political aspirations of individual elite households. Moreover, the ancient belief that Naevius suffered prison first and exile later has been challenged, and the modern idea that the poet suffered both because he had outraged the Metelli has been dismissed.[28]

As it stands, the nature of the evidence makes any attempt to reconstruct Naevius's life extremely conjectural. Even so, the later narratives focused on Naevius's impertinence should not be discarded altogether. In fact, together with the textual shards that testify to the exchange between the poet and the Metelli, they suggest a quite compelling scenario.

We learn about this exchange from later grammarians who attributed to the poet the following line (Ps.-Ascon. ad Cic. *Verr.* 1.10.29): "Fato Metelli Romae fiunt consules," "In Rome, the Metelli became consuls by fate." As has been often remarked, this line is organized in an iambic senarius; accordingly, it may belong to one of Naevius's *fabulae praetextae*, a dramatic genre invented by Naevius himself and centered on Roman mythological and historical exploits.[29] This hypothesis is hard to corroborate since the scholiast calls this line a *dictum* and does not link it to any specific setting or poetic script.[30] On the other hand, we read that the Metelli

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28 Gruen 1990.92–100 and Goldberg 1995.33–37. For the reference to prison, see Gellius 3.3.15; modern scholars have corroborated the passage from Gellius through Plaut. *Miles* 209–12 and Festus 32 Lindsay. As for his exile, see Jerome *Chron. a. a.* 1817.

29 On the *fabula praetexta* and the sacral dimension of *imperium*, see Zorzetti 1980.53–73. For speculations regarding its context of performance, see Flower 1995. On the nature and role played by the *fabula praetexta* in Roman culture, see Wiseman 1994 and 1998.

30 A point aptly made by Goldberg 1995.35. Jed Parsons points out to me that Naevius's line could also be read as a defective Saturnian because *Metelli* is longer than *fato* (the first half-line should be longer than the second); the line, in other words, would work only if there were another word before *fato* that has dropped out. The prospect that Naevius actually produced a defective Saturnian is untenable. Yet in the snapshot reported by the scholiast, this detail contributes to the characterization of Naevius's audacity: he tries to imitate an authoritative Saturnian, but he fails, and what comes out is an iambic senarius, a typically poetic meter. In this sense, even the scholiast's identification of this line as a *dictum* is indicative since, as Habinek 1998b.71–73 points out, *dicere* and its derivatives refer to an attempt on the part of the speaker to establish a hierarchical relationship with his interlocutor.

were enraged by this verse and, by means of a Saturnian, they promised to punish the poet (Caesius Bassus *GL* 6.266 Keil): "malum dabunt Metelli / Naevio poetae," "The Metelli will do harm to Naevius the poet."

To a certain extent, this exchange of verses confirms the scenario implicit in Livius Andronicus's *Odussia,* for it clearly points to close encounters between poets and members of the ruling elite. The encounter suggested by these specific verses, however, is organized around a poetic elaboration of the political and military deeds of a distinguished aristocratic household. This new poetic focus suggests a growing elite interest in the poetic medium and in its potential for displaying the actions that had sustained the formation of a new ruling class. Yet the Metelli's assertion of authority expressed in a Saturnian may also indicate that the practice of representing these actions was a delicate one, if not a privilege that some members of the ruling group were unwilling to hand over unconditionally to the poets.

The Metelli's choice to borrow the expression *malum dare* from the comic stage sheds further light on the scenario condensed in this reported exchange. Through this gesture, not only would the Metelli cast themselves in the role of comic masters, they would also recast the poet right onto the stage and into the role of the clever slave who, though clever, is still to serve his masters.[31] Moreover, if we are to believe that, with the *Bellum Poenicum,* Naevius situated his claim of authorship in the context of war, the poem included an attempt on the part of the poet to reap social prestige in a way comparable to that of his addressees. Accordingly, the exchange may also imply that some members of the ruling elite interpreted Naevius's strategy of self-fashioning through his epic as an added act of insolence, as if the poet had taken the liberty of speaking to the ruling elite as one of the ruling elite.

What all of this amounts to is that the poets were free to manipulate Greek literary materials and to circulate in the highest spheres of society, but they were also intruding into socially crucial spaces and practices. Or to put it another way, what we read about Naevius suggests that poetry was a new medium, and the prospects that it raised for the Roman ruling group were both enticing and disturbing. Poetry was enticing because it was a practice that deepened and extended the cosmological dimensions

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31 For the elaboration of this point, I owe much to Sander Goldberg, who drew my attention more decisively to this element during a post-conference email exchange. For the comic language inherent in the Metelli's line, see Gruen 1990.100 and Goldberg 1995.35.

inherent in their efforts at expansion. But it was also disturbing because poetic attempts to garner social prestige by meddling in authority-building activities threatened the very prerogatives whereby the elite had long constructed and affirmed their hegemony. These prerogatives were based on specific practices and constituted a resource that the ruling elite guarded carefully and valued highly.[32]

ENNIAN SOLUTIONS AND ELITE RESPONSES

This is the backdrop against which I propose to situate Ennius's *Annales*. Composed after M. Fulvius Nobilior's victory in Aetolia, this epic emerges as one of the most visible instances of poetic collusion with the conquering practices of Rome's rulers. For one thing, Ennius's use of the hexameter and his invocation of the Muses are the means whereby Ennius reflected on his participation in Fulvius's feats of conquest: these included the plundering of objects representing the Muses in Ambracia. The *Annales*, however, was more than that. It was also an epic script deeply entangled in the reconsecration of these objects in Rome. In fact, after his return, Fulvius placed them in his new temple, right next to a shrine dedicated to the Camenae, the deities invoked by Livius.[33] Furthermore, if one takes into consideration that, in the portico of his temple, Fulvius displayed *fasti* and a year-by-year list of consuls and censors, the relationship between Ennius's poetic project and Fulvius's religious complex becomes even more pervasive.[34] Indeed, Ennius appears to have mapped his account of elite exploits through time precisely on the conception of history and heroism that Fulvius was promoting through his religious building.[35] But if these elements bear witness to Ennius's entanglements in Fulvius's military and civic activities, it is also crucial to acknowledge that Ennius manipulated the Greek epic tradition in order to carve for his audience a very specific perspective on his poetry and his subjectivity.

After his invocation of the Olympian Muses and their beating

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32 For an anthropologically oriented discussion of how aristocrats define themselves in traditional societies through distinctive behaviors and activities, see Helms 1998.116–20.

33 For more on the ideological effects of Fulvius's manipulation of the Muses and Camenae within the temple, see Sciarrino 2004a.

34 For the *fasti* and the list of consuls and censors displayed in the temple, see Macrobius *Sat.* 1.2.16.

35 Gildenhard 2003.95–97, building upon Rüpke 1995a. See also Rüpke's contribution to the present volume, pp. 508–10.

feet ("Musae quae pedibus magnum pulsatis Olympum," *Ann.* 1), the poet describes his dream encounter with Homer (*uisus Homerus adesse poeta*, "The poet Homer seemed to be present," *Ann.* 3), during which he learns that Homer's soul has migrated into his body (Skutsch 1985.147–67). Thanks to the insertion of this episode, Ennius situates his poetic authorship within a profoundly non-Roman context and manages partially to occlude what had prompted the construction of the *Annales* in the first place, namely, his close connection with Fulvius. Furthermore, by presenting himself as Homer reincarnated, Ennius promotes an understanding of his selfhood as a powerful and yet innocuous conduit for Homer's relocation into Rome. In this sense, it is particularly important to keep in mind that Ennius's adoption of the hexameter had a profound effect on the aural reception of his scripted performance since the rhythm of his speech would have in no way conjured up the song tradition of his audience. If this were not enough, Ennius took care to define his poetic craft as *poemata* ("latos <per> populos res atque poemata nostra / <clara> cluebunt," "Through peoples far and wide, the matter and my poems will become famous," *Ann.* 12–13); as such, during the performance of his script, he would have also encouraged his audience to conceive of his poetry as a self-standing (i.e., written) object of verbal design capable of speaking by itself.

Later on in the poem, Ennius returns to the issue of his poetic craftsmanship and expands his poetic claims in other directions. In Book 7, he shuns the Saturnian by associating it with a pre-poetic world of song and by refusing to write of the war treated by Naevius ("scripsere alii rem / vorsibus quos olim Faunei uatesque canebant," "Others have written of the matter in verses that once the Fauns and the seers used to sing," *Ann.* 206–07).[36] With this, he also flaunts his allegiance to the literary standards of the Alexandrian tradition ("[cum] neque Musarum scopulos / nec dicti studiosus [quisquam erat] ante hunc . . . nos ausi reserare," "[When] neither the rocks of the Muses . . . nor [was there anyone who was] a lover of words before this man. We dare to open . . ." *Ann.* 208–10). Finally, in Book 10, Ennius "corrects" Livius Andronicus's translation of the first line of the *Odyssey* in a way that promotes once again the understanding of his poetry as a textual artifact (*Ann.* 322–23):[37]

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36 For emphasis on the distinctive nature of the verses attributed by Ennius to *fauni* and *uates*, see Wiseman's contribution to this volume.

37 It was clear already to Gellius (18.9.3) that Ennius was working from the first line of Livius's *Odyssey*. As for the interpretation of this line as a "correction," see Skutsch 1985.499.

insece Musa manu Romanorum induperator
quod quisque in bello gessit cum rege Philippo.

In these two lines, Ennius emends Livius's invocation of the Camenae and
states that the subject of the poetry that will follow is "what each Roman
general accomplished in the war against King Philip." More importantly, he
pushes the meaning of Livius's *insece* from "sing" to "pursue" and, perhaps,
goes so far as to correct *insece* into *inseque*. Ennius's ultimate choice is
hard for us to reconstruct since, already in antiquity, it was not at all clear
which of the two verbs Ennius had used.[38] Yet the meaning of "pursuing/
following" seems to be corroborated by Horace's allusion to this meaning
in Epistle 2.2.71, cited above, and Ennius's insertion of *manu*.[39] Although
critics tend to translate *manu* as "by feats of valor," I prefer to associate the
noun with the initial verb and to understand *manu* as "by my hand." If not
so, I would at least allow for the possibility that Ennius played with both
meanings of the word.[40]

It is often remarked that these fragments signal the beginning of a
new type of epic and proclaim Ennius's self-separation from his poetic pre-
decessors in general and Naevius in particular. Most recently, Ingo Gilden-
hard qualifies this generalized perception by emphasizing the authority
inherent in the old song tradition associated with "fauns and seers" rejected
by Ennius. Gildenhard astutely concludes that Ennius's deployment of con-
ceptual resources generated in the Greek world makes his claim to poetic
authorship tantamount to an abdication of social authority.[41] This strategy
can be clearly detected in the famous scene of the "Good Companion" that
Ennius inserted in his epic script (*Ann*. 268–86).

The surviving scene sketches the interaction between Servilius
Geminus and an unidentified man of lower standing. But if we can trust

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38 Gellius 18.9.5. See also Hinds 1998.59.
39 See also Hinds 1998.71 n. 37.
40 Skutsch 1985.499: "used somewhat redundantly to denote feats of valour of which *manus*
    (pl.) is synonym in Virg. *Aen*. 6.683." But compare also the use of *manu* in relation to
    poetry, authorship, and performance in Plautus *Men*. 3: "apporto uobis Plautum, lingua
    non manu," "I am carrying Plautus not in my hand [i.e., as a literary text] but with my
    tongue [i.e., in performance]." If my suggestion is correct, he would also be rearticulating
    the intersection between poetry and war that is inherent in *Ann.* 12, cited above.
41 Gildenhard 2003.103–04. Gildenhard considers the scene of the "Good Companion" as well,
    but fails to offer a more nuanced account of the social pressures that guided Ennius's inser-
    tion of this scene within his epic script. Cf. also Goldberg p. 436 in the present volume.

ancient commentators, this passage also portrays Ennius's own relationship with his patron—or at least a social relationship compatible with his circumstances.[42] If so, the military camp setting would also suggest that, through the character of the *amicus minor*, Ennius aimed to reflect on his involvement in Fulvius's military campaign. Unlike Naevius, however, Ennius does not speak of or take pride in his direct participation in military actions; instead, he emphasizes the benefits that a member of the ruling elite can draw from having a lesser but faithful man at his side at all times. Such a man provides the busy politician and active general with a safe venue by which to alleviate the burdens of power at home and war abroad. Moreover, he knows when and how to speak and is always ready to offer his extraordinary knowledge of human and divine matters to those powerful men who are willing to take his part (see also Habinek 1990). Accordingly, Ennius represents someone in his position as a person who does not pretend to be what he is not. By the same token, he lays no claim to military and political prestige and presents himself as preserving and transmitting a specific type of cultural knowledge that is to be used and consumed by his elite audience.[43]

On the whole, Ennius's strategies of self-presentation alert us once again to the possibility that some members of the ruling elite could not bear to have their class-specific activities replicated by the poets because such replications would have denied them the differences upon which their socio-cultural hegemony was based. Further indications of these elite anxieties can be drawn from Cato the Censor's attitude towards poetry.

In the *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero writes (Cic. *Tusc.* 1.3; cf. also 4.3):

> sero igitur a nostris poetae uel cogniti uel recepti. quamquam est in *Originibus* solitos esse in epulis canere conuiuas ad tibicinem de clarorum hominum virtutibus, honorem tamen huic generi non fuisse declarat oratio Catonis, in qua obiecit ut probrum M. Nobiliori, quod is in provinciam poetas duxisset; duxerat autem consul ille in Aetoliam, ut scimus, Ennium.

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42 Skutsch 1985.93–94, 447–62. See also Gellius 12.4, where this passage is presented as an example of proper behavior for an *amicus minor*.

43 For Ennius's exploration of wisdom in the period, see Habinek's contribution to this volume.

>   Therefore our people got to know or accept poets late.
>   Although we find in the *Origines* the information that
>   guests at banquets used to sing to the sound of the pipe
>   about the manly deeds of famous men, a speech of Cato
>   makes clear that there was no social prestige attached to
>   this genre, since he reproaches M. Nobilior for taking
>   poets with him to his province. In fact, as we know, when
>   consul, he had brought Ennius to Aetolia.

For all its convoluted syntax, this passage makes clear that Cato criticized Fulvius's decision to take poets on his military campaign and denied social value to poetry. What it does not elucidate is the relationship between epic and the ancestral convivial practices that Cato evokes in the *Origines* and, in turn, how Cato's attack on Fulvius qualifies this relationship. In his contribution to this volume, Sander Goldberg focuses on Cicero's lack of clarity and highlights the three layers of testimony underlying this passage: the facts regarding banquet songs and Ennius's presence in Aetolia, what Cato says about these songs, and Cicero's purposes in giving such an account. By arguing that the *Annales* was produced earlier than Cato's speech, Goldberg denies that Cato's target was Ennius's writing of an epic in praise of Fulvius Nobilior and turns his attention to the production of the *Ambracia*. At the same time, he demolishes the possibility that Cato knew firsthand the convivial songs that he cites by relying on Cicero's assertion that they used to be performed centuries before his time (*Brut.* 75). Moreover, he considers a surviving fragment of the *Carmen de Moribus* (Gellius 11.2.5) in relation to Polybius's testimony about contemporary banquets and concludes that the *convivia* that both Cato and Polybius criticized could not have been the sites for the performance of epic in the second century B.C.E. and any time before. Finally, Goldberg goes so far as to deny the existence of a "song culture" altogether because of a lack of explicit references in the textual sources.

Goldberg's contribution has the merit of reminding us that we will never be in a position to restore the specific content and form of the songs evoked by Cato or to unfold a chronologically sound narrative about the development of Roman cultural practices "before poetry." Despite these limitations, I find it hard to dismiss the evidence that supports the pre-existence of song traditions in general and convivial practices in particular.[44] As it

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44 For the archeological evidence, see Rathje 1990, 1994, 1995. For pre-poetic performance
    traditions, see Wiseman 1998.1–16 and Cornell 2003 (who focuses on the figure of Corio-

stands, it is more fruitful to note that Cato draws from the past to articulate two different paradigms of performance in both the *Carmen de Moribus* and in the fragment of the *Origines* mentioned by Cicero in *Tusculan Disputations* (1.3 and 4.3). In the former, he measures the social worth of poetry against what the ancestors used to think about the contamination of elite banquets by non-elite practices and non-elite individuals. Banquets, in turn, are the contexts in which Cato in the *Origines* situates the ancestors in the act of singing what the best of them had accomplished. Accordingly, on both occasions, Cato reached into the "back then" and retrieved a very specific socio-cultural paradigm. Rooted in the interrelation between war and banquets, this paradigm rests upon an understanding of both as the sites where Rome's rulers had always performed their social role. War is where the members of the ruling elite had regularly asserted their identity by proving their military abilities. Banquets, on the other hand, are identified as the places where these same individuals had traditionally measured new enterprises against previous ones, bestowed praises on their authors in the form of songs, and nourished an exclusive repertoire of behavioral exempla passed down without the mediation of writing or underlings.

To determine the historicity of the songs evoked by Cato is less important than to acknowledge the normative behaviors and social rules that, through this evocation, Cato aimed to propose to his peers. On the other hand, the focus on achievements as well as the solo performance that, according to Cato, characterized the ancestral convivial songs encouraged Cicero to construct a historical continuity between these songs and epic.[45] Cicero could easily do so also because the poets had looked to exclusive contexts like the *convivium* from the first translation of epic—indeed, from Livius Andronicus's very choice to transform the Homeric hexameters into Saturnians. By building upon the Livian precedent, Naevius had more forcefully stretched the norms that helped set this context apart by arrogating to himself the faculty of measuring and exemplifying the exploits of the ruling elite as if he were one of the ruling elite. In this respect, Cato's evocations

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lanus). Wiseman rejects the pre-existence of epic by suggesting that the stories that we read in later historians bear the signs of a "pre-historical" tradition of popular drama. In the framework that I am proposing, drama and epic are sub-categories of poetry (intended as a cultural form and practice linked to the poets who operated from the middle of the third century B.C.E. on in Rome). By the same token, this framework allows us to recategorize any pre-poetic cultural expression in relation to the social identity of the performer and the context of performance. For a thorough treatment of Roman song, see now Habinek 2005.

45 A point nicely made by Goldberg in his contribution (p. 429).

of ancestral practices shed clear light on the uneasy matches that surrounded the formation of Roman epic and facilitate our understanding not only of Naevius's blunders but also of Ennius's attempts to avoid them. Finally, by taking these evocations as seriously as (say) Ennius's invocation of the Muses, we can also open ourselves up to a more nuanced and (I hope) more compelling interpretation of Cato's resistance to poetry.

As I have pointed out, Cato spoke very clearly against the meddling of poets in military and convivially oriented practices. This fact seems to be at odds with Nepos's report about Cato's sponsorship of Ennius's arrival in Rome.[46] However, in light of Cato's status as a *homo novus* in need of resources to sustain his positioning among the powerful, Nepos's description of Cato's initiative as his "Sardinian triumph" points to the imperialistic logic that underlies the overall development of Roman poetry. In this sense, what needs to be acknowledged is that, as opposed to someone like Fulvius Nobilior, Cato's investments in Ennius had nothing to do with what the poet could do for him by means of his poetic craft or by passively reciting his written compositions. In fact, certain elements indicate that Cato was more concerned with seizing Ennius's craftsmanship and putting a mark of ownership on the poet's imports.

Luca Cardinali argues (1987) that, in the opening of the *Origines,* the word *homines* is nothing more than a gloss that is used to explain the rare and archaic form *ques*. Accordingly, he proposes expunging the word and invites classicists to acknowledge the presence of a hexameter (frag. 1 Peter): "Sí ques [homines] súnt quos délectát populí Románi gesta discribere," "if there are men who like to systematize in song the deeds of the Roman people."[47]

Cardinali's emendation has unearthed the source of those idiosyncratic hexameters that we read in the opening of later historiographical works.[48] What interests me, however, are the socio-cultural dynamics that

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46 Nepos *Cato* 1.4. For a review of the scholarly discussion surrounding this testimony, see the introduction by Rossi and Breed to this collection (p. 401).

47 For this translation of *discribere*, see Sciarrino 2004b.340–43.

48 Sall. *Jug*. 5 ("bellum scripturus sum quod populus Romanus"), Livy 1.1 ("facturusne operae pretium sim"), Tac. *Ann.* 1.1 ("urbem Romam a principio reges habuere"). Cugusi 1994.265–66, Cugusi and Sblendorio Cugusi 1996.146–70, and Cugusi and Sblendorio Cugusi 2001 ad Cato *Orig.* 1.1 reject Cardinali's reading by claiming that the presence of *homines* in other parts of the Catonian corpus supports its retention in this context. Though seemingly circular (whereby we would be reading our experience of later historians back into Cato), Cardinali's argument is reinforced by examples of *si ques* or *si quis* closer in

emerge from considering the metrical construction of this line in its histori-
cal context. For if, on the one hand, it provides us with an important piece
of evidence for the elite reception of the *Annales*, on the other, it encodes
an act of mimicry that reaffirms the instrumentality of the poets as cultural
expropriators working in the interests of their elite sponsors.

On another level, the mimetic act that characterizes the beginning
of the *Origines* adds to the overall picture that I have been drawing and is
part of the very strategy whereby Cato sought to curb poetic intrusions into
authority-building contexts and practices. As I argue elsewhere (2004b),
such a formal choice sustains Cato's proposal of a socially exclusive song
modeled after ancestral convivial customs meant to rival and outdo epic.
Focused on Roman achievements, Cato's song was meant to render poets
and epic completely redundant. In the process of unfolding his account, Cato
gives up the musical and/or rhythmical dimensions inherent in the ancestral
paradigm in order to make his own representation formally different from
those proposed by the poets. Moreover, while he does employ writing like
the poets, he modeled his writing activities on those of the *pontifex maximus*
and preserved his own account of Roman exploits and two of his speeches
only to share them with his peers. Accordingly, Cato's reservations about
poetry went hand in hand with an attempt to convince the elite to add to a
store of knowledge to be passed down in written form that would remain
as exclusive as the unwritten convivial tradition of older times. This store
was meant to include cultural materials drawn from alien and subordinate
traditions; yet the behavioral exempla preserved in it would still be based
upon those social performances and in-group activities that had always
marked the supremacy of the ruling group in all fields.

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time to Cato (see the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus* in the phrase "sei ques esent
qui sibi deicerent necese ese Bacanal habere" and in proemial contexts in Ter. *Phorm*. 12
and *Eun*. 4). See also the discussion in Churchill 1995.