

PANEL ON INTERTEXTUALITY: RESPONSE

4 January 2013

Let me begin first by thanking Chris for the invitation to provide a response to these papers, and the authors for providing all of us with a good deal to think about. It must be said, however, that one of the great virtues of this format is that it invites responses from all of you as well, and let's face it, you are a formidable crew. So I very much look forward to the discussion that will follow, and to hearing your response. My aim in these brief remarks is not to critique each of these papers; even if I felt competent enough to do so, I don't think that's my job. Rather I'd like to put on the table a few observations that may—or may not—pave the way for subsequent conversation. My observations have to do with what I perceive to be especially important and discussion-worthy points raised by these papers, and more broadly with historiography and intertextuality generally.

I think we can agree that it would be impossible to cover all the points posed in the brief to this panel within the compass of four papers. There is, to be sure, a good deal more to the subject than has been touched upon here, and this is a point I will come back to toward the end. You all know this, but it is worth remembering just how much has been written in the past decade about intertextuality in historical writing, or more generally about the relationship between poetry and history. One need think only of the several major volumes, each the product of a conference, published within the past decade: *Clio and the Poets* in 2002, *Latin Historiography and Poetry in the Early Empire* in 2010, *Greek and Roman Poetry and Historiography*, also published in 2010. Each of the two major 'companions' to Greek and/or Roman historiography—one edited by Andrew, the other by John—contain major contributions to our understanding of intertextuality in historical writing. And this is not to mention any number of influential studies, in the form of both books and articles, written by some of the people in this room and liberally cited in the notes and bibliographies of the papers we have read for today. Then, too, there are these very panel sessions that have been held in each of the last three years. It's not that previous generations of scholars were inattentive to or uninterested in at least some form of what we have come to call 'intertextuality'. But while scholars and commentators such as Vretska, Ogilvie, Furneaux, Koestermann, or Syme often prove to be very useful, dependable guides to the language and inspiration of the historians they study, they do not often (ever?) think in terms of 'allusion', if they would even call it that, and what it 'means'; indeed, the notion of literary allusion

as a form of ‘reflexive annotation’, to borrow my colleague’s Stephen Hinds’ term, may well have seemed quite strange to them and out of place.

We, on the other hand, have become fairly comfortable with thinking in these terms. The current interest in intertextuality in historiography, or in other prose genres for that matter, was in part inspired by work done by scholars of Roman poetry, who were in turn inspired by people such as Kristeva and others, as Will reminds us. I think, of course, of Conte, Fowler, Barchiesi, Hinds, and others.

Scholars of Latin prose, however, are rapidly catching up. It is striking, that is, to read through some of the recent work of the last decade I just mentioned and realize the magnitude of the contributions made by those who have focused on intertextuality in prose texts. I can tell you that I do not read any ancient historian now the way I did 25 or 30 years ago, and that is directly a result of this scholarship. This is, I believe, one very healthy consequence of the breakdown of the artificial boundaries that developed between poetry people and prose people.

As one small illustration of how I believe today’s papers underscore some of the ways our understanding of ‘intertextuality’ has evolved, let me quote Don Fowler from 1997 in the foreword he wrote to a special edition of *MD* devoted to intertextuality: ‘We do not read a text in isolation, but within a matrix of possibilities constituted by ...’ Note my dramatic pause: can you complete this quotation? ‘...earlier texts, which functions as *langue* to the *parole* of individual textual production: without this background, the text would be literally unreadable.’ While I believe that this remains fundamentally true statement, I also believe that the work of 15 years of scholarship requires us to qualify it in some important ways. The papers written for this session help explain what I mean.

Let’s start with notion that a ‘text’ operates within a matrix of possibilities constituted by ‘earlier texts’. Jane Chaplin’s paper¹ ably shows that it is entirely possible for an allusion found in a text to have its source not in an ‘earlier text’ but rather in the historical actor. She chooses as a test case Scipio Aemilianus, arguing that in his life he deliberately modelled himself after the father of his adoptive father, the famous Scipio Africanus. She neatly navigates a potential objection to this idea, that Polybius ‘forged an Aemilianus eager to live up to his family name(s) and likely to imitate noble ancestors whenever he could’, by marshalling a considerable body of additional evidence. In making this argument she draws on both Cynthia Damon and John Marincola,² who in his paper for the 2011 version of this pan-

¹ *Histos* Working Paper 2013.01.

² *Histos* Working Paper 2011.03.

el discussed the textual practice of allusion and the human practice of exemplarity. We could, I suppose, debate the merits of calling this not ‘intertextuality’ but ‘interdiscursivity’, a term I know some people prefer to describe this phenomenon—I’m not inclined to argue about terminology, though perhaps that’s something we might talk about later. In the last few pages of her paper Jane makes an especially interesting point, that what she terms ‘Aemilianus’ intertextual relationships may well be more important for the practice of history than they are for the reading of literature; she urges that ‘the fruits of this ongoing scholarly conversation be brought back to the practice of history.’ This is also something we might talk about further.

Fowler’s ‘matrix of possibilities’ strikes me as of a piece with Will’s eloquent plea to understand, and I quote, that ‘the reader of intertextuality must, like the writer, be open to the plurality of texts which is language’. Will chides a few scholars—notably Earl, Ramsey, and McGushin—for conjuring here and there ‘an unrecognizable Sallust’. If I have grasped his point, Will questions the urge to reduce Sallust to any single meaning; rather, this is a text, again to use Will’s words, that ‘stirs, confuses, disrupts, and finally does not make neat sense.’ The ‘intertext’ in Sallust is not necessarily or exclusively an ‘earlier text’; it may be the Roman ethical system, the ‘moral dimensions of Roman history’... but nonetheless as conveyed by Sallust’s language, language deployed in his own prologue and then redeployed, I would say provocatively, in Catiline’s speech in Chapter 22. As Will goes on to say, in his discussion of the opening of the *Catiline*, ‘Sallust’s intertextuality is not with Isocrates or Plato or even Cicero, but with the traditional wisdom of Greece and the traditional language of virtue at Rome.’ So here, too, is a compelling argument for an intertextuality between a text and ... something that is not a text; Andrew will make a somewhat similar point in his own paper. Moreover, Will, it seems to me, provides further support for Fowler’s contention that ‘without this background’—that is, without an understanding of the moral world and even historical context in which the *Catiline* was written—‘the text would be literally unreadable’.

This particular claim has always bothered me a bit, because it does seem to reduce those who can ‘read’ (and understand) an author such as Sallust to an élite club. But even card carrying members of that club may miss something, a point forcefully brought home to me by Andrew’s paper and his discussion of Catiline’s famous ‘quo usque tandem’. This paper reminded me of what proved to be a particularly educational moment for me. I first encountered the suggestion that these were originally Catiline’s words, and subsequently borrowed by Cicero, not by reading the secondary scholarship Andrew cites but in an undergraduate class I taught a few years ago on the *Bellum Catilinae*. When we came to this passage in class, I learnedly observed

that this was of course a well-known allusion to Cicero. One student expressed surprise, and questioned the idea: why, he asked, should we not believe these to be the words of Catiline? I started to ask him why he hadn't read Ramsey's commentary, as assigned, but doubtless channelling Will Batstone, I stopped myself in mid-sentence, wondering how—and more importantly, why—I thought I should correct what seemed to me a misguided idea. Even after I had elucidated the allusion, the student persisted, 'Maybe Cicero stole it from Catiline'. The experience was a lesson in the dangers of complacency when reading this, or any other text; sometimes we need to put aside those commentaries and ask the obvious, if seemingly naïve, question. It is absolutely true that Sallust wants us to believe that this is what Catiline said—and what happens if we take a moment to take that idea seriously, as Andrew encourages us to do? How does that complicate our notion of the 'intertextual' relationship at work here? In this sense I'm not entirely convinced that without an awareness of its precedents or even its historical context 'the text would be unreadable'—my student managed to read it quite well. Andrew's paper, like Will's, compels us to rethink what's going on with those three words. I actually think Will's and Andrew's papers have a good deal in common, and wonder if they would agree. But one point in Andrew's paper particularly grabbed my attention, and that is his assertion that in Catiline's 'moral portrait' Sallust 'marks him out as a dividing line between the old historiography and the new'. This is an idea we might pursue further in discussion.

With Jackie's paper we come to the one contribution that takes on poetry. Beginning with the observation that epic poetry and historiography admittedly have a good deal in common, she argues that what separates the epic poet and the historian is not so much their aims but a 'different mode of expression'—both are committed to 'what happened in the past' (I confess I am glad she did not write 'what really happened'). Especially valuable is her insistence that we initially approach Ennius and his influence by putting aside, to the extent we can, the Augustan and post-Augustan lens through which we all too often tend to evaluate earlier literature. Seen through the eyes of Cicero, Ennius does indeed appear to be accorded as much authority as any historian. More than that, Jackie contends that Ennius belongs more with the historians than he does with Terence or Catullus; what we might see as distinctive poetic and aesthetic tropes—repetitions, Homeric modelling, for instance—she argues make 'a significant contribution to the plausible relation of a validated past explanatory of the present and more recent history'. It is perhaps worth remembering Cicero's complaint in the *De legibus* (1.7; written in mid-40s?) that Romans are deficient when it comes to historical writing—he clearly means prose writers in this passage—and it is true that Rome's greatest contributions in this genre will come after

Cicero. So perhaps it is no surprise that a man who chose poetry to commemorate his own history would privilege Ennius in the way he does. But I wonder if in a post-Ciceronian age and with the rise of Roman historiography, epic poetry loses some of its currency as a historical medium? (I am resisting for the moment uttering the name ‘Lucan’.)

What I especially appreciate about the papers is the degree to which several of them build on a very broad base of work produced in the past ten to fifteen years. While as I have said I am reluctant to draw from them firm conclusions about the issues posed in the panel’s brief, I do think they urge us to continue to think seriously about the notion that historiography is somehow a ‘special case’ when it comes to intertextuality. But at the same time—and this is important—if one looks at the scholarly underpinnings of these papers, it is clear that the work of Levene, O’Gorman, Damon, Marincola, Lushkov, and Pelling (I’m going to leave somebody important out) now sits very comfortably and essentially next to that of Conte, Fowler, Barchiesi, Hardie, Hinds and others.

Finally, I think it is incumbent on me to mention some of the things these papers do not address—not by way of criticism, but rather by way of suggesting the many rich and in some cases still unexplored possibilities that this subject presents. One cannot fail to notice, for instance, that with the exception of Jackie’s paper, there is not much discussion of the intertextuality of poetry and historiography or other kinds of prose. With respect to ‘other kinds of prose’, I’d like to make a pitch for Cicero as an intertext ... and for the Roman annalists. A good deal of interesting work has been done and is being done about inscriptions and literary texts (I’m thinking of Ramsby’s study of elegy, as well as of the forthcoming volume entitled *Inscriptions and their Uses in Greek and Latin Literature* edited by Liddel and Low (now published by Oxford)); historiography should be front and centre in this work. It should be noted, too, that if we are going to accept the notion that an ‘inter-text’ does not always mean an actual text, then building, monuments, art—material culture, in other words—have to be, and indeed already are, part of the conversation, as it was in last year’s panel (be on the lookout for Chris Hallett’s *Art, Poetry and Civil War: Vergil’s Aeneid as Cultural History* from Oxford). And somehow—here is the largest elephant in the room—we managed to avoid imperial literature almost entirely. Which is surprising. Perhaps one question I would raise in this connection is whether or not the practice of intertextuality evolves and changes between Republic and Empire. Jackie’s paper suggests, in the case of Ennius, that it does. And broadly speaking, the answer to my question is surely yes, even though I am not sure we have satisfactorily answered the question why. Also left aside is what to me, at least, is an interesting topic: intertextuality in imperial Greek writers.

To some it may seem that we are going overboard, that the whole subject of intertextuality is beginning to lack recognisable boundaries and has become unwieldy. But if in fact we believe that in our reading of a text, either in prose or in poetry, we need to listen for the ‘plurality of voices’ or to look for Fowler’s ‘matrix of possibilities’, then no avenue may be left unexplored. Evidence, or lack of it, will of course always be a problem; I felt special sympathy with Jackie’s lament that, ‘The evidence that would allow me to work towards the full claim that I would like to make ... has not survived.’ But this does not mean we should not ask questions to which at the outset we know there are no firm answers.

All of which is to say that the subject is far from exhausted. Let me conclude by quoting—who else?—Ronald Syme and the first sentence of *History in Ovid*. Reading it now, over thirty years after it was written, I am struck by how differently this sentence reads in 2013 than it did in 1978: ‘The poems of Ovid offer the historian much more than he might expect.’ Our understanding of intertextuality opens up that statement in ways Syme could not have imagined, and just as importantly, is responsible for the fact that we now read not just Ovid and other poets—but even Livy, Sallust, or his beloved Tacitus—in very different ways from Syme.

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