AFTERLIVES OF THE ROMAN POETS

Conscious of ancient modes of reading poetry 'for the life', Roman poets encoded versions of their lives into their texts. The result is a body of literature that cries out to be read in terms of lives in reception. *Afterlives of the Roman Poets* shows how the fictional biographies (or 'biofictions') of its authors have shaped the reception of Latin poetry. The book tells a cultural history of the reception of ancient literature as imagined through the lens of poets' lives: from medieval biographies of Ovid inscribed in the margins of his texts to republican readings of Lucan's death in periods of revolution to 'The Death of the Author' in Hermann Broch's *Der Tod des Vergil*. Putting modern life-writing studies and ancient poetry into dialogue, it brings biofictional reception to debates in classics, and puts antiquity and its reception onto the map of modern studies in life-writing.

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Biofiction and the Reception of Latin Poetry

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For James, Clara, and Nina

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Series Editors' Foreword

We are witnessing a flourishing of life-writing, nowhere more so than in the ubiquitous writer's memoir, which blurs the edges of fiction and non-fiction, letting readers into the space between narratorial ego and authorial desire. In the idiom of Deborah Levy, these memoirs artfully rehearse writers' innermost stories – the things that they themselves don't want to know.[1] Scholars of ancient Greek and Roman fiction share no such intimate contracts with the writers whom they study, but this has not discouraged inquiry into the significance, if not the reality, of the lives of ancient Greek and Roman authors. In the past fifty years, critical studies of ancient biography (as it was then called) or life-writing (as it is now called) have moved from an emphasis on the fictions of biography to authorship studies, with the focus increasingly on the intersection between ancient biographical traditions about author's lives and author fictions. Nora Goldschmidt's *Afterlives of the Roman Poets: Biofiction and the Reception of Latin Poetry* signals a new phase in this debate, and is positioned as a contribution to classical scholarship on biography and authorship studies, as well as to work on life-writing *tout court*.

Goldschmidt opens our eyes to just how significant the biographical impulse is in conditioning our understanding of Roman poetry. She presents a highly dynamic system in which critics, authors and readers each generate forms of biography to serve their own ends. Poets compose autofictions as they envisage their poems as a site for the future reception of their authorial selves – autofictions which in turn are read, received, edited and transmitted by other poets. With so many lives in the making, it is understandable that critics and readers are inevitably drawn into the process of reading for the poet's life as revealed in their poems. This process is 'biofictional' (a term adopted from Alain Buisine), since reading for the poet's life entails constructing a preferred image and imagining of

[1] Deborah Levy, *Things I Don't Want to Know. On Writing*, London, 2013.

the poet, which then authorises further readings. Goldschmidt sketches out a spectrum of biofictional reception that extends from the ubiquitous author-centred criticism that is part of the classicist's hermeneutic toolkit to the bolder, inventive reconstructions of Ovid in medieval European literatures. The latter resemble fan-fiction treatments of Ovid, not unlike the treatment that Ovid himself metes out to literary personae in the *Heroides* (see Chapter 1).

Afterlives of the Roman Poets is a vibrant work of cultural history that traces the influence and operation of biofiction in life-writing across a range of literatures and periods, always alert to the historical and cultural currents that animated successive versions of Roman poets' lives. Goldschmidt shows us the rich fantasy life of Ovid in the medieval works associated with the *aetas Ovidiana*; the artful resurrection of Horace in the English Renaissance drama of Ben Jonson, creative fictions of Lucan in the English revolutionary period in the seventeenth century and the French revolution in the next century. She also analyses the appeal of Lucretius as a figure onto whom Victorian poets such as Matthew Arnold and Tennyson projected their own modern subjectivities and animating concerns as they navigated between science and theology. The final chapter, on Hermann Broch's biographical fiction about Virgil's death, analyses Broch's use of the theme of Virgil's death to work through key post-modernist preoccupations about the life of the author, with Broch's biofiction about Virgil merging with Broch's own autofiction.

Goldschmidt's focus on biofiction as reception holds particular interest to us as editors of a series devoted to the exploration of 'classics after antiquity'. Goldschmidt introduces the argument that the popular idea of the 'afterlife' (*Nachleben*) of classical antiquity puts the structuring metaphor of 'the life' at the centre of the classical tradition. The idea that authors' lives survive and migrate through time via the transmission, circulation and adaptation of their texts is prevalent in this tradition. As a privileged branch of this tradition, classical scholarship has also endorsed this metaphor, with reconstructions of poets' lives used to authorise new interpretations of their poetry. Even contemporary classical scholarship cannot escape the governing trope of 'the life': in the recent turn towards studies of materialism, embodiment and affect in classical scholarship, the material life has become a potent idea as we search for poets' physical voices (their vocality), their emotions and desires, and how their bodies made their texts.

This is a nimbly argued work of literary criticism and literary history that uses the concept of biofiction to chart a fascinating through-line from scholarship on ancient lives to current theoretical literature on life-writing. The life has seldom felt so vital a category of analysis for interpreting ancient Greek and Roman literature.

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The book was much improved by the insightful and incisive comments of the series editors, Alastair Blanshard, Shane Butler, and Emily Greenwood, and the helpful feedback of the anonymous reviewer for Cambridge University Press. The individual chapters range across several periods and specialisms, and I have been very lucky to have benefited from the expertise of several scholars who generously read and commented on chapter drafts: Ralph Hexter, Justin Stover, and Carlotta Dionisotti (Chapter 1), Victoria Moul (Chapter 2), Emma Buckley and Tom Stammers (Chapter 3), John Batchelor (Chapter 4) and Paul Michael Lützeler (Chapter 5) have all been extremely generous with their time and their specialist knowledge, while Philip Hardie kindly read and commented on the whole manuscript. I owe them all a heartfelt debt of thanks.

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Publishing Corporation, from *Tell Me Again How the White Heron Rises and Flies Across the Nacreous River at Twilight Toward the Distant Islands*, copyright ©1986 Hayden Carruth. Finally – beyond any biofictional discourse – I am, above all, grateful for the support of the friends and family who have made life real.

Abbreviations and Note on the Text

Ancient texts follow the standard Oxford Classical Texts or Teubner editions, unless indicated in the notes. Apart from Classical Latin, which I have standardised, spellings of medieval, early modern and later works follow the editions or manuscripts cited. Translations from Latin, Greek, French and German are my own unless stated otherwise. I have tried to keep abbreviations to a minimum with a few exceptions:

Donatus auctus = *Vita quae Donati aucti dicitur*, in G. Brugnoli and F. Stok, eds, *Vitae Vergilianae antiquae* (Rome, 1997), 71–135.
DV = *Pseudo-Ovidius, De vetula. Untersuchungen und Text*, P. Klopsch, ed. (Leiden, 1967).
Krenkel = *Lucilius. Satiren*, W. Krenkel, ed. and trans., 2 vols (Leiden, 1970).
KW = *Hermann Broch. Kommentierte Werkausgabe*, P. M. Lützeler, ed. (Frankfurt am Main, 1974–81).
Marx = *C. Lucilii carminum reliquiae*, F. Marx, ed. (Leipzig, 1904–5).
Russo = *Quinto Ennio. Le opere minori. Introduzione, edizione critica dei frammenti e commento*, vol. 1. *Praecepta, Protrepticus, Saturae, Scipio, Sota*, A. Russo, ed. (Pisa, 2007).
SE = *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, J. Strachey, ed. and trans. (London, 1953–74).
Skutsch = *The Annals of Quintus Ennius*, O. Skutsch, ed. (Oxford, 1985).
Suda = *Suidae Lexicon*, A. Adler, ed., 5 vols (Leipzig, 1928–38).
TrGF = *Tragicorum Graecorum fragmenta*, vols 5.1–5.2, R. Kannicht, ed. (Göttingen, 2004).
VSD = *Vita Donatiana e Vita Suetoniana desumpta*, in G. Brugnoli and F. Stok, eds, *Vitae Vergilianae antiquae* (Rome, 1997), 9–56.