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Emma Greensmith
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CHAPTER 1

Beginning Again (Introduction)
The Poetics of Impersonation

1.1 Prologue: Still Homer?

At an unknown place and time in the imperial Greek third century,[1] an epic picks up from the last line of the *Iliad*. This poem, known to posterity as the *Posthomerica* and whose author goes only by 'Quintus of Smyrna',[2] begins without a proem, Muse invocation or stated subject, but with a temporal conjunction – a 'when' – which implies not so much a start but a continuation:

Εὖθ' ὑπὸ Πηλείωνι δάμη θεοείκελος Ἕκτωρ
καί ἑ πυρὴ κατέδαψε καὶ ὀστέα γαῖα κεκεύθει,
δὴ τότε Τρῶες ἔμιμνον ἀνὰ Πριάμοιο πόληα
δειδιότες μένος ἠϋ θρασύφρονος Αἰακίδαο·
ἠΰτ' ἐνὶ ξυλοχοισι βόες βλοσυροῖο λέοντος (5)
ἐλθέμεν οὐκ ἐθέλουσιν ἐναντίαι, ἀλλὰ φέβονται
ἰληδὸν πτώσσουσαι ἀνὰ ῥωπήια πυκνά·
ὣς οἱ ἀνὰ πτολίεθρον ὑπέτρεσαν ὄβριμου ἄνδρα
μνησάμενοι προτέρων, ὁπόσων ἀπὸ θυμὸν ἴαψεν
θύων Ἰδαίοιο περὶ προχοῇσι Σκαμάνδρου, (10)
ἠδ' <ὁπ>όσους φεύγοντας ὑπὸ μέγα τεῖχος ὄλεσσεν,
Ἕκτορά θ' ὡς ἐδάμασσε καὶ ἀμφείρυσσε πόληι,
ἄλλους θ' ὡς ἐδάϊξε δι' ἀκαμάτοιο θαλάσσης
ὁππότε δὴ τὰ πρῶτα φέρε Τρώεσσιν ὄλεθρον.
τῶν οἵ γε μνησθέντες ἀνὰ πτολίεθρον ἔμιμνον. (15)
ἀμφὶ δ' ἄρα σφίσι πένθος ἀνιηρὸν πεπότητο
ὡς ἤδη στονόεντι καταιθομένης πυρὶ Τροίης.

Q.S.1.1–17

When godlike Hector had been vanquished by the son of Peleus and the pyre had consumed him and the earth had covered his bones, the Trojan forces stayed

[1] On this dating and its controversies, see 1.7.
[2] On the names, both much later, non-biographical conjectures, see Baumbach and Bär (2007): 1–2 for an overview. Further discussion below.

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inside the city of Priam terrified of the noble might of bold-hearted Achilles, grandson of Aeacus. Like cows which, unwilling to face a grim lion among the thickets, flee pell-mell and cower in the dense undergrowth: just so, inside their city, they shrank from the mighty warrior, remembering the many lives he had already cut short in his rampage around the streams of Scamander whose source is Mount Ida, the many men he had slaughtered as they fled under the great wall, his killing Hector and his dragging him round the city, and all the others he had slain in his passage through the restless sea when first he came bringing death to the Trojans. Such were the memories that kept them inside the city; and bitter grief fluttered all around them, as if Troy were already being burned with grievous fire.

This non-beginning contains an intense and carefully constructed nexus of allusions to Homer's first poem, signalling its status as a direct link – an 'Anschluss' – to the *Iliad*.[3] The first line specifically reminds us of the first *and* last lines of the *Iliad*. Πηλείωνι evokes the patronymic naming of Achilles in line 1 of the *Iliad*, and the verb δάμη, 'tamed', echoes the final adjective of Book 24, ἱπποδάμοιο '(Hector) tamer of horses'. The first adjective applied to Achilles in the *Iliad*, δῖος, is also perhaps cued and glossed by the adjective θεοείκελος, 'god-like'. In Homeric exegesis from the Alexandrian era onwards, the sense of δῖος as an epithet was much debated (does it mean 'god-like', 'noble' or 'descended from Zeus'?), whereas θεοείκελος means, definitively, 'godlike': Quintus' choice could be answering this Homeric question.

The narrative then continues (18–19), 'And then from the streams of the broad-flowing Thermodon came [ἦλθε] Penthesileia. . .'. This verse takes its cue from the alternative ending of the *Iliad* included in some manuscripts; where instead of the usual last word, ἱπποδάμοιο, one finds ἦλθε δ' Ἀμάζων, 'There came an Amazon'. The plot here slips into the first line of the *Aethiopis*, and the next phase of the saga.[4] This sequence thus takes place within the space opened by these two readings. Hector's death (line 1) is separated from the arrival of the Amazon (line 18) by an expansion that covers in a nutshell the whole narrative from Achilles' arrival in the war to the fall of Troy, which is imagined as 'already' (ἤδη) burning: the flashback to the Iliadic past is joined with a prolepsis to the cyclic future, which every reader of this poem will already know.

[3] This is by now the well-established interpretation of the epic and its opening, stretching as far back as Köchly (1850). Discussion of these and other allusions in Keydell (1963) (especially at 1273), Schenk (1997) (who uses 'Anschluss'), Kakridis (1962), Bär (2007), Maciver (2012b): 29–33 and now Goldhill (2020): ch. 3.

[4] Further treatment of Quintus' relationship to the Epic Cycle in 1.10. All of my comments in Chapter 1 are designed to foreground and anticipate later, sustained analysis.

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This is therefore an opening which simultaneously claims to be 'still the *Iliad*' and also a highly self-conscious reading of the *Iliad*, which revels in its own oblique relationship to the Homeric critical tradition. Just as the frightened Trojans recall the earlier heroes (μνησάμενοι προτέρων, 9) so this passage is forged from poetic memory. Here is an epic beginning without the expected invocation of the Muses, but which repeats the verb associated with the mother of the Muses, and thus with 'the memorializing function of epic'.[5]

However, these echoes do not, *qua* the usual logic of referentiality, urge the reader just to look back to the mythological and literary past. Instead, at the correlative δὴ τότε (3), the opening shifts across the sequence of tenses, and moves the *Iliad*'s narrative situation back closer to the present. With ἔμιμνον in line 3, the aorist gives way to the imperfect, and the verb's meaning mirrors its move to the past continuous: an indication of the poem's position, in which the characters 'remain' in the *Iliad*. With the participle δειδιότες (4) the aorist is further overturned, and the past completed now becomes perfect. The Trojans were scared and are scared: their fear is triggered by an event in the past, but one which has a consequential state in the present.

The description then yields to a simile (Q.S.1.5–7), the first instance of the feature of which this poem will go on to make such frequent use. But why start with *this* simile? Why put it precisely here? There is a heavy denseness to these lines, not only in the image (the huddling and the thickets), but also in its construction: the subject (βόες) is conjoined with the aggressor (βλοσυροῖο λέοντος, 5); the verbs run together, a mass of *etas* and *thetas* (ἐλθέμεν οὐκ ἐθέλουσιν ἐναντίαι, 6); the bushy thickets shrink into themselves (πτώσσουσαι ἀνὰ ῥωπήια πυκνά, 7) . . . everything is squashed. This emphasis on proximity, set at odds with the desire to 'go out' or stand opposed (ἐναντίαι), could offer an opening indication of the poem's whole relationship to the Iliadic narrative: they will not be set apart, but joined together closely. When the aorist is reasserted (ὑπέτρεσαν, 8) its sense of a past completed has thus been destabilised by the multitextured presentism of the intervening lines. This antagonism between past and still-present also operates in the linguistics of memory: the aorist μνησάμενοι (9) again yields to the perfect μνησθέντες (15). This is a literary recapitulation framed as a memory – but an act of remembering which, the repeated ἔμιμνον stresses, is itself set to 'remain'.

[5] Goldhill (2020).

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The epic thus begins by raising as a *question* the possibility of its status as 'still Iliadic': it thematises as well as narrativises the 'seamless' progression from Homer's first poem to this familiar and yet eerily new here and now. Its story then proceeds to tell in fourteen books the events of the Trojan War which took place between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and ends with a proleptic gloss to the start of the *Odyssey*'s narrative – the first lines after the proem:

> . . .οἱ δ' ἐνὶ νηυσὶν
> Ἀργεῖοι πλώεσκον, ὅσους διὰ χεῖμα κέδασσεν·
> ἄλλῃ δ' ἄλλος ἴκανεν, ὅπῃ θεὸς ἦγεν ἕκαστον,
> ὅσσοι ὑπὲρ πόντοιο λυγρὰς ὑπάλυξαν ἀέλλας.
> Q.S.14.665–8

Meanwhile those Argives still aboard ship sailed on, scattered by the storm; and they arrived in different places, where a god guided each one, as many as had survived the voyage through that disastrous storm.

> ἔνθ' ἄλλοι μὲν πάντες, ὅσοι φύγον αἰπὺν ὄλεθρον,
> οἴκοι ἔσαν, πόλεμόν τε πεφευγότες ἠδὲ θάλασσαν·
> *Od.* 1.11–12

Now all the rest, as many as had escaped sheer destruction, were at home, safe from both war and sea.

The 'safe' returns of the *Odyssey*'s own opening recapitulation are closely predicated and anticipated in these closing scenes: the *ad hoc* 'arrival' on random shores (ἄλλῃ δ' ἄλλος ἴκανεν) is the first, necessary stage of the real Odyssean homecomings (οἴκοι ἔσαν); and the indeterminate group contained in the Homeric ὅσοι φύγον (the generalised many to contrast particularly with the singular, particular 'man' [τὸν δ' οἷον νόστου κεχρημένον, *Od.* 1.13]) is echoed and enabled by Quintus' ὅσσοι . . . ὑπάλυξαν – the escape the destruction of the stormy sea allows the safe and dry presentism of those lucky ones who have reached the start of the *Odyssey*.

The so-called *Posthomerica* thus proclaims in fact a profoundly *inter*-Homeric position: not just a piece of the cyclic saga, a 'slice of Homer's banquet',[6] but a carefully construed narrative location, it seems, precisely in between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*: Quintus occupies the complex, tense Homeric middle. And the Homeric relationship does not end there. Not only is language throughout thoroughly indebted to Homer, but the narrative also features in enormous numbers many defining Homeric

[6] Cf. Athenaeus' oft-quoted 'quotation' of Aeschylus (*Sophists at Dinner* 8, 347e).

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features – particularly similes, *gnomai* and ekphrasis – including, most starkly, a certain shield of Achilles, which appears 'again' in Book 5 of this poem. Stressed as being the same shield (the same object) as appeared in the *Iliad*,[7] this unique piece of Homeric description is narrated here once more in its full ekphrastic glory, but with different, 'later' aspects of its cosmological story emphasised; imagined as elements which were always already there:[8]

> ἄλλα δὲ μυρία κεῖτο κατ᾽ ἀσπίδα τεχνήεντως
> χερσὶν ὑπ᾽ ἀθανάτῃς πυκινόφρονος Ἡφαίστοιο·

Countless other scenes had been skilfully wrought on the shield by the hands of the ingenious god Hephaestus.

Q.S.5.97–8

Then, most drastically of all, the poet uses his singular moment of self-description to represent himself *as* Homer: a programmatic self-identification that occurs in a strikingly late proem in Book 12:

> τούς μοι νῦν καθ᾽ ἕκαστον ἀνειρομένῳ σάφα Μοῦσαι
> ἔσπεθ᾽, ὅσοι κατέβησαν ἔσω πολυχανδέος ἵππου·
> ὑμεῖς γὰρ πᾶσάν μοι ἐνὶ φρεσὶ θήκατ᾽ ἀοιδήν,
> πρίν γε μοι <ἔτ᾽> ἀμφὶ παρειὰ κατασκίδνασθαι ἴουλον,
> Σμύρνης ἐν δαπέδοισι περικλυτὰ μῆλα νέμοντι. . .

Q.S.12.306–10

Muses, I ask you to tell me precisely, one by one, the names of all who went inside the capacious horse. For you were the ones who filled my mind with all song even before down was spread across my cheeks, when I was tending my renowned sheep in the land of Smyrna. . .

In what would be the mid-point of a Homeric epic, before he embarks upon his own catalogue of heroes, Quintus claims most directly to be Homer; *not* by saying 'I am Homer', but instead by preserving Homer's

[7] See Maciver (2012b): 40: 'The shield, more than any other part of the *Posthomerica*, represents the poem's intertextual dialogue with the Homeric poems. . . since the shield of Achilles in Q.S.5 is the same shield as that given to Achilles in *Iliad* 19 and made by Hephaestus in *Iliad* 18' (although of course, as he clarifies with notable directness [n. 9]: 'strictly speaking, of course, the shield of Achilles does not ever exist.'). Thus the actuality which we are talking about here exists on the level of fictional physicality, in the realm of illusion.

[8] On the conceit here, see the excellent discussion of Maciver (2012b): 47: 'the expression ἄλλα δὲ μυρία implies that there are an inexhaustible number of scenes on the shield of Achilles, and that neither the Iliadic nor post-Homeric narrator described all [of them], but rather only decided to describe some of them, according to their own interpretations of the world of the shield'. Also now Maciver (2018): 79.

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renowned anonymity, and evoking Smyrna, one of his most famous birthplaces in the biographical tradition. However, alongside this Homeric proclamation, this proem also includes some strong allusions to later Greek poets; most outstandingly in line 310, which near-on quotes the *Somnium* of the *Aetia*, where Callimachus re-presents Hesiod's meeting with the Muses (ποιμένι μῆλα νέμοντι παρ' ἴχνιον ὀξέος ἵππου/Ἡσιόδῳ Μουσέων ἑσμὸς ὅτ' ἠντίασεν [. . .], *Aet.* fr.2.1–2).

This dynamic merging of Homeric mimesis and Homeric biography, making 'Homer' quote Hesiod and Callimachus, epitomises the dramatic form of identity poetics on display. As is traceable first and foremost through these central pivots – the opening sequence, the closing verses, the 'still Homeric shield', and the delayed proem – this epic voice is characterised by a fundamentally paradoxical stance towards its primary and overwhelming model. In a move that renders it unique among surviving imperial Greek epic, its relationship to Homeric epic is one of impersonation, not just imitation. And yet at every stage of this impersonation, the reader encounters obstacles which disavow these authoritative authorial claims: philological quirks, contemporary references and later literary allusions; all loitering just beneath the Homeric surface, constructed so as to almost – but never quite – escape detection.

The reason for starting with these essential passages (each of which will return as a central focus point in the chapters to come) stems from the questions about the aesthetics and politics of Homeric reworking that they so powerfully raise. That Quintus is 'Homerising' is commonly accepted by any scholar who has looked at or worked on this text. But what is far less understood is what this Homerising means: for the poet, for his reader and for the imperial culture in which he was composing. It is not possible to appreciate any of the recent re-evaluations of Quintus unless the intensity of his relationship to Homer is more deeply interrogated.

This book therefore puts forward a new way of understanding this remarkable epic, its poetics, agenda and literary identity. It is my central contention that Quintus' response to Homer represents a new formative poetics. To be characterised neither by 'second sophistic' epigonality, nor by Hellenistic allusiveness, nor silver Latin belatedness, the *Posthomerica* involves inserting oneself *within* fixed, pre-existing literary boundaries, occupying the space in between antiquity's oldest pillars, Homer's two canonical poems. This type of response should be conceptualised instead, I suggest, as a **poetics of the interval**: a mode of continuation which does not start from where the old poet left off, but intervenes non-linearly, engaging with Homeric epic as a text internally and inherently incomplete,

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canonically bounded and finished, but conceptually a living work to be expanded and re-embodied.

I turn first to constructing and analysing, through a number of different vectors, this interval poetics of the *Posthomerica*, and aim to trace the *consequences* (literary and cultural) of this strong, sustained and self-conscious interstitial Homeric position.[9] This programmatic middleness, the drive to find a space within what is already there, to revivify Homer and re-animate the past, emerges as an intense form of meditation on a specific strand of cultural politics in the third century, involved in the shaping of Greek erudite identity in the East. To access these consequences, however, also requires a departure from the critical discourse in which the poem, and imperial Greek epic more broadly, is currently situated. By making this departure, my second major intention is to demonstrate how Quintus' poetics could be pivotal for rethinking prevailing scholarly conceptions of this era of epic, suggesting what it meant to resurrect the Homeric idiolect in the later Roman Empire.

1.2 Opposition in Imitation

> 'One useful approach to great "imitative" texts is to see them as re-readings of the works imitated.'
>
> – Martindale, *Redeeming the Text*, 35

> 'Roman literary-historical self-fashioning operated through a revision of previous Hellenising revolutions, a revision which can simultaneously be an appropriation and a denial . . . these poets carved out cultural space for themselves by consigning their predecessors to the dustbin.'
>
> – Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext*, 10

> 'The poet is always challenged to be supreme in the supreme genre . . . the ever-present desire and its attendant anxiety.'
>
> – Hardie, *The Epic Successors of Virgil*, 119

[9] A note on terminology is required at this early stage: throughout this book, I shall use both the notions of the 'interval' and the 'interstitial' to define Quintus' Homeric self-positioning, in full awareness that the terms are not synonymous, but rather offer a mutually fruitful double act for discussing the types of 'middleness' at play. The brevity usually associated with an 'interstice', for instance, will capture the ways in which Quintus works to reduce the space (narrative and chronological) between Homer's two epics, and between Homeric time and imperial time. And the perceived inter-ludic nature of the 'interval' (*qua*, for instance, toilet breaks in a modern theatre performance) will work to show how the *Posthomerica* ironically anticipates derogatory assessments of its poetic quality in relation to Homer – simply a text to 'pass through', to fill in the gaps in the cyclic story between Homer's masterpieces – and turns the idea of liminality and transition into an active, culturally relevant, temporal statement.

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'Opposition in imitation' or 'contrast imitation' has long been considered an important type of literary response in antiquity, becoming increasingly self-conscious with the Alexandrian poets. Thus, to take an initial but paradigmatic case, the now seminal work on Apollonius and the Hellenistic poetic tradition has revealed quite definitively how this literary era's 'self-conscious textuality' unleashes a dynamic tension with its Homeric epic model: thus Apollonius' poem 'proves to be a meditation upon the problems of "epic" . . . within the parameters bequeathed by Homer.'[10] In a ground-breaking series launched at the end of the twentieth century, the authors of *Roman Literature and its Contexts* sought to demonstrate how this Alexandrian adversarial style of imitation was specifically harnessed by Augustan and post-Augustan Latin literature.[11] Focusing on theories of hermeneutics, supplementarity, reader reception, historical contingency and the Anxiety of Influence, the project presented the principles of a creative emulation to characterise the poets of the Latin tradition, and used it to cast new insights on both the emulating poets and their original models.

Charles Martindale borrows from Harold Bloom and Derridean deconstructionism to sketch his particular way of conceptualising the interpretative process; namely that 'any interpretation, unless it is mere tautology, must be a re-stating, and thus *different* from whatever is interpreted.'[12] The notion of supplementarity, that 'a signifier is so charged with an excess of energy that it generates further fictions, which serve to answer unanswered questions, fill "gaps", explain perceived contradictions, provide sequels and allow for appropriations in view of new circumstances'[13] helps to account for the process of continued interpretative revision that Martindale reads as acutely present in the Latin tradition and its inheritors: the constant striving for, but refusal of, textual closure.

[10] Hunter (1993): 36. To Hunter's tide-turning analysis of Apollonius can now be added a mammoth number of studies and readings in this (still on-going) 'golden age' of Alexandrian criticism in the classics. See the bibliography compiled by Cuypers for an overview of the volume of work done on these poets up to July 2012: sites.google.com/site/hellenisticbibliography/empire (date last accessed 13.04.20).

[11] The whole series spans 1993–2016. My interest is principally in the first and second wave of publications, from 1993–8, which are the most influential and are also considered the most 'radical.' The following discussion does not aim to suggest that this group are the only voices in this discussion, nor the most important: see also for instance the invaluable contributions of Henderson (1987), Barchiesi (1986), Feeney (e.g. 1991) and Bartsch (1994) – each of whom will also appear as interlocutors in the chapters to come. My reason for focusing on this series here is due to the specific and often specifically stated impact that it has had on imperial Greek epic studies (see discussion and examples in 1.3).

[12] Martindale (1993): 37. [13] Ibid.

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Stephen Hinds applies many of these tenets to his now (in)famous study of allusion in Roman poets.[14] Following Conte's conception of allusion as an analogical figure,[15] Hinds characterises the patterns of reference in Ovid, Statius and Lucan as 'tendentious re-readings' of their literary models, expressed through a range of 'tropes', which he defines as figural symbols (words, images, characters) used to characterise authorial engagement. From Ennius onwards, and no doubt before, Roman writers create old poets in order to proclaim their newness, and thus concepts such as 'new', 'old', 'secondary' or even 'decline' are not just modern labels, but inherent to these writers' literary self-conceptions.

The work of Philip Hardie has anchored this model most firmly to the epic tradition. In his incisive readings of post-Augustan Latin epic, Hardie shows how the successors of Vergil 'at once respectful and rebellious, constructed a space for themselves through a creative imitation that exploited the energies and tensions called up but not finally expended or resolved in the *Aeneid*'.[16] Theories of supplementarity and Oedipal struggles also loom large for Hardie, but he goes one step further by demonstrating the epic genre's innate hospitality to these processes. Epic, by its very nature, must be rivalrous, because of the fundamental ambition of its undertaking: attempting to compose within the most foundational of literary genres, this is a power game played for the highest of stakes.[17]

As Hardie's study also shows, the process of contrast imitation has strong political potential. As writers responding to the problems and contradictions of the principate, poets such as Ovid, Lucan, Statius and Silius Italicus reveal 'anxiety' about imperial as much as poetic succession: their re-readings of the *Aeneid* bring to the fore its questions about the viability of a lasting age of peace, the relationship between power and the sacred, and the chaos caused when an empire turns in on itself. This political dimension has been explored most capaciously by David Quint in *Epic and Empire*.[18] In his account of how the epics of the western tradition responded to the two different narrative modes offered by the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Quint centralises and politicises the idea of 'continuity', and the creativity triggered by the desire for its avoidance. Thus Lucan, in his

[14] Cf. Hinds (1998): 47–51. [15] Conte (1986): 23–4; 52–69. Hinds (1998): 120–1.
[16] Hardie (1993): xii.
[17] Ibid: 118–19. Cf. Steiner (1989): 13: the successor poet is always 'answerable to the original' because it 'puts at eminent risk the stature, the fortunes of his own work'.
[18] Quint (1993).

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anti-Vergilian, anti-imperial epic, mounts a critique on 'the conservative tendency of the epic genre to perpetuate, through imitation, its own formal structures of narrative and diction, its motifs and commonplaces of plot: the same story told over and over'.[19]

This framework has had a momentous impact on readings of ancient epic: the critical rewards which are now associated with contrast imitation are rich and abundant. This form of intertextuality, once pitched as revolutionary by its champions, has now become deeply entrenched in the industry of classical scholarship; a means of recuperating a poem's quality by a demonstration of how it imaginatively re-works the language of its predecessors – the same story told over and over. It has provided a particularly positive stimulus for studies in silver Latin,[20] doing much to increase interest in these once neglected works by revealing their complex literary-political textures. Since the turn of the century, however, it has found a further epic test site, to which I now turn.

1.3 Silver Latin, Imperial Greek?

A surge in interest in the Greek literature of the Roman Empire has seen scholars gradually direct attention towards the epic composed during this period. Between the second and sixth centuries CE more Greek hexameter verse was composed (and survives) than during any other comparable era of antiquity. Whilst statistics alone, admittedly, can mean little in literature, what this density begins to suggest is that epic remained, as it was for Greeks throughout antiquity, the most prestigious literary form, the apex of the hierarchy of genres. The Homeric epics themselves stood at the centre of imperial Greek culture: the avatar of *paideia*, Homer was studied at every stage of the education system.[21] Despite these facts, epic – and poetry in general – was for a long time almost entirely neglected by scholarship on this period in comparison to prose: only thirty-five years ago did Habicht feel confident to declare that in imperial Greece, 'poetry

[19] Quint (1993): 8 using Greene (1963). Quint's is of course far from the only – or the overbearing – version of Lucan as politics. Henderson's account of Lucan's 'Word at War' (1987) remains indispensable and unsettling. For Masters (1992) Lucan's obsessive poetics comes to embody, rather than merely describe, the political discord of civil war.

[20] I use this term here as I shall throughout this book, in a non-pejorative sense as a shorthand for the post-Augustan poets of the first two centuries CE.

[21] We return centrally to the topic of Homer and imperial education in Chapter 2.

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