

*Magnae spes altera Romae: Cicero and Vergil in later Latin tradition*  
Caroline B. Bishop (University of Pennsylvania)

In this paper, I examine the connection between Vergil and Cicero in their ancient reception. Though modern scholars tend to study the two authors and their literary output as discrete categories with little overlap, this was not the case in antiquity. As the acknowledged masters of the Latin canon in poetry and prose, respectively, Cicero and Vergil had an extremely significant place in the Latin tradition. Each was larger than life and each, I argue, became a convenient signifier: Vergil for Latin poetry and Cicero for Latin prose. A survey of their treatment by commentators and literary critics reveals the frequency with which they were invoked in concert, and the implications this has for the way we understand the Latin canon.

I begin with a curious incident involving the two authors preserved in Vergil's *vita* tradition. Both Servius and Donatus report an anecdote in which Cicero attended an early reading of Vergil's eclogues. Impressed by the young poet's literary talent, he is said to have remarked that Vergil was the "other hope of great Rome" (*magnae spes altera Romae*). Vergil, the story goes, so treasured this statement that he inserted it verbatim into the *Aeneid*, where it comprises the second half of line 168 in Book 12. I argue that this anecdote is a fictional representation of a very real phenomenon: the links formed between Cicero and Vergil in the schools and in scholarly output.

These links are enumerated as I examine the historical evidence offered by literary critics and commentators. Seneca the Elder's report of the judgment of Cassius Severus on the two demonstrates the close relationship that they shared in the minds of later Roman generations. They are seen as two as halves of one perfect, yet unattainable, Latin whole: Cicero could not write poetry, and Vergil would have failed if he had tried to write prose (*Contr.* III. *praef.* 8). Together, the implication is, they complete the canon.

The careers of two ancient commentators who worked extensively on both Vergil and Cicero also bear their close relationship out. First is Asconius, the author of five extant commentaries on the speeches of Cicero, who was also famous in antiquity for a defense of Vergil against his *obtretractores*. Also of note is Macrobius, who speaks extensively of Vergil in his *Saturnalia* and also wrote a sprawling work on Cicero, the *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*. Macrobius is of particular interest for the near-reverence in which he holds the two authors: at *In Somn.* II.5-7, he is at pains to show that they are in agreement about the number of zones in the heavens.

This new examination of the later tradition surrounding Cicero and Vergil suggests that the *Nachleben* of one cannot be easily separated from the other. Indeed, the history of the two in antiquity was more intertwined than has previously been thought. I conclude that it is no coincidence that later Romans often spoke of and studied the two in close proximity. After all, Cicero and Vergil were studied in the schools as the paragons of prose and poetry, respectively. A scholar who showed an interest in both was therefore no dilettante pursuing a specialized study; rather, he had amply demonstrated full mastery of the Latin canon.