

Who am I? Style and Identity in Poetic Fragments

“Whole texts are bullies” (Goldberg 1995: v). They are not the only ones; bigger fragments jostle the smaller, whether on their own or with their quoting authorities as back-up. Important new work on Cato and Ennius has reaffirmed their importance for both Latin literary, and Roman political, histories (e.g. Sciarrino 2011; Elliot 2013; Goldschmidt 2013), and even Cicero’s hexameters have been given new life (Volk 2011). Fragments of both prose and poetry are more accessible than ever before (historians: Cornell et al. 2013; poetry: Blänsdorf et al. 2011; Courtney 1993; Hollis 2007). But, the fact remains: there is not enough room in our literary histories (or our syllabi) for all the poets whose names we know but about whose work we can say little, and thus just as Vergil trumped Ennius, so Gallus edges out Valerius Aedituus.

Fragments can give us something that whole texts cannot, however, and tiny fragments can give us more yet: the opportunity to explore our assumptions about matters of genre and style, about meter and vocabulary, about pleasure and meaning – and to explore these assumptions in an arena without right answers or, often, any answers at all. Over the course of this fall semester, I am working with a group of volunteers (University undergraduate and graduate students) on a set of fifteen hexameter fragments, most of which are only one line long, and about which they have been told nothing (and which they have been kindly requested to avoid investigating). Their task: to decide whether the fragments belong to one work by one poet, or to the same poet’s different works, or to the works of multiple poets, and then within their chosen frame to arrange the fragments and reconstruct as much as possible the work(s)’s larger context and date. The catch: there is no consensus either as to the solution to this puzzle, or as to the criteria upon which it may reasonably be approached. The fragments may belong to any of two or three poets (or perhaps even four) who have come to us with the gentilician name

Furius. Furius Antias and Furius Bibaculus are the most famous, but scholars have posited one or two other Furii who may take possession of outlier lines. Studies of both of the better-known poets illustrate the wealth even a single line can hold (e.g. Batstone 1996; Kruschwitz 2010).

What is at stake is more than an enjoyable exercise. We know of only two historical epics from the second century BCE: Hostius' *Bellum Histricum* (from which fewer than eight fragmentary lines survive) and Accius' *Annales* (of which we have not quite ten). From the first century BCE, Suieus' two fragmentary hexameters may perhaps add a third historical epic, before we reach Cicero and the scant traces of Varro Atacinus' *Bellum Sequanicum*. If the hexameters attributed to the several *Furii poetae* cannot plausibly be united within one work, by exploring all of the ways in which they differ, we will have learned something valuable both about these poets and about our own working methods in the analysis of Latin hexameter poetics.

But if they *may* plausibly be united within one work, it could effectively double the number of lines of Roman historical epic from the Republic (excluding Cicero's *De consulatu suo*) and the thought experiment alone would help to move the study of that genre from out of the 'curious-but-regretful-footnote-to-Ennius' and into the larger, and increasingly more complex, conversations taking place within the main text. Preliminary discussions suggest this as a *possibility* – and no external evidence precludes it; this paper will present the process and the conclusions, along with their implications for Roman poetic and commemorative practices.

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