

Manuscripts of Vergil's poems were in circulation at the end of the first century B.C. and Ovid's generation already knew the *Aeneid* as a "great book." Survival of Vergilian manuscripts has permitted the transmission of the poem to modern times. Moreover, the manuscript tradition of Vergil includes the two codices in the Vatican that figure importantly in classical philology and in art history.

But what about the *oral* aspects of Vergil's verse? The Romans listened to poetry recited in public: too often we read it silently to ourselves. The Roman practice of *recitatio* or public reading of a literary work by an author became established at Rome when C. Asinius Pollio, orator and statesman, friend and early patron of Vergil, offered a public reading of his work (Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae*, 4.2). Often enough scholars treat Vergil's work as a continuation of Hellenistic poetry, and there is good reason to think of Vergil and Callimachus and Vergil and Apollonius when one thinks of Vergil as a literary stylist. However, with all respect given for the influence of Hellenistic poetry on Vergil, Vergil seems primarily to have had the rivalry with Homer in mind as he composed; and Homeric poetry, regardless of what it became by the time of a "Peisistratean recension," must be understood as oral poetry.

What, then, if modern readers were to acknowledge and then look beyond Vergil the Hellenistic poet, the literary stylist, and consider him as an oral poet, or at least as one pretending to be an oral poet? Certainly Vergil meant his poems to be heard and certainly they were heard: Tacitus tells us in the *Dialogue on Orators*, 13, of a time when an audience, hearing Vergil's verse recited in the theater, applauded enthusiastically to acknowledge the poet who was, in fact, present. Certainly scholars have observed poetic effects in Vergil that can only truly be appreciated when a poem is read aloud like alliteration, anaphora, euphony and onomatopoeia. Yet, the performative aspects of Vergilian poetry have not received enough attention. How might the work of Homeric scholars such as Gregory Nagy in *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond* (Cambridge, 1996) serve as a springboard to a new understanding of Vergilian composition and performance? How might the work of scholars such as Charles Martindale in *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception* (Cambridge, 1993) continue to open new paths to understanding the received texts of Vergil? And how might good philology and creative intuition work together for new interpretations of Vergil today? Here is where the translator and the reader enter, each a creator and an interpreter, each crucial for the survival of Vergil in our times.

If one takes the *Aeneid* as the crowning achievement of Vergil because of its status as the Roman equivalent of the Homeric poems, one must consider the *Aeneid* not only as great literature, but as *great literature for performance*. When one evaluates Vergil's *Aeneid* in English, one must be sensitive not only to a translation which renders Latin into understandable English, one must also look for a translation that performs well.