

A Missing Link: Cicero's Poetry in the Latin Literary Tradition

The poetry of Cicero has often been downplayed or ignored in poetry scholarship (c.f. Goldberg 26, Knox 193), but more recent scholarship has begun reassessing Cicero's poetic works and viewing them more generously, consciously looking for evidence of new innovations and connections to other poets within Cicero's style. (Gee 95, Volk 94) Moreover, since Cicero's work makes up a significant percentage of surviving poetry from this period, ignoring it due to assumptions or prejudices limits our ability to expand our understanding of how republican poetry developed and what influences it may have had on later authors. Several scholars have noted that Cicero's poetry provides something of a transition between earlier republican and later authors (e.g. Ewbank 2), and certain developments such as Cicero's refinements of the hexameter and other technical matters have received much attention (e.g. Courtney 150-2, Ewbank 40-71), but there is still more that can be said. By looking at three key poetic features: alliteration, enjambment, and interlocking word order, this paper explores areas of his poetic work where Cicero's transitional position within the larger Latin tradition is clearly apparent.

Alliteration has long been understood as a hallmark of Latin hexameter poetry, first established by Ennius' overuse as in the famous line *ō Tite, tūte, tatī, tibi tanta, tyranne, tulistī!* but still prevalent in later authors, especially Vergil (Clarke 281). Cicero, while softening noticeably from the dramatic alliteration of Ennius, still uses it more often than Vergil and in various innovative ways, such as spread out over several consecutive lines of poetry (e.g. *Aretea* 34.126-133), suggesting an intermediate period in the development of its use in Latin hexameter. Likewise, Ennius uses very dramatic and specific necessary enjambment, while Vergil makes a softer unnecessary form a central feature of his hexameter style (Lanham 187). In addition to

other metric developments discussed above, Cicero also uses different kinds of enjambment to develop the poetic style of the *Aratea*, coming significantly closer to Vergil in his preferences. Rather than the dramatic, aggressive effect achieved by Ennius' repeated enjambment, Cicero attempts to create a different effect by using a variety of different types throughout the *Aratea*, including the unnecessary type favored by Vergil. Finally, Cicero often makes use of interlocking and chiasmic word order in ways that are similar to the kinds often seen in Catullus and Vergil, which is not particularly common in Ennius (Ross 134). He even includes several instances of the famous "golden line" considered a hallmark of neoteric Catullan poetry in the *Aratea*, such as in *Aratea* 34.68. In all three of these techniques, Cicero changes from the traditional usage of Ennius to something more similar to later poets, and his influence can often be discovered in the ways later poets such as Vergil (Gee 96) Lucretius (Gee 93), and potentially even Catullus given the similarities of word order and meter (Courtney 152) both imitate his style and engage directly with his writing through various intertextual means.

While Cicero's employment of particular literary features is by no means exactly like the poets who come before or after him, a careful study of his poetry provides a more complete image of the Latin poetic tradition and its development over time by depicting more explicitly the way these stylistic elements changed during a period for which we have very little other evidence. By expanding on and enumerating Cicero's place in the development of these key poetic techniques, this paper expands the conversation surrounding Cicero's stylistic influence on later poets and opens a door for continued investigation into the significance and meaning of these connections, allowing a broader understanding of later poets as well as a more accurate description of Cicero's own position within the tradition.

Key Sources

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