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Greek and Roman Drama and the *Aeneid*

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Interpretative Shifts

It is instructive to begin with a tale of two cities in recent scholarship. The central issue is the relationship between the socio-political setting and the master-works of literature produced by each city in its heyday.

In the first city, the relevant literary production now is viewed mostly in terms of its social and civic function. The purpose of the literary works was 'to reflect the institutions of society',¹ to 'validate political and social order',² and they were sponsored 'for the maintenance and reinforcement of community cohesion'.³ The plays served as 'propaganda' by instilling the 'ideology of the city' and its values.⁴ Call it 'state-indoctrination'. The audience is 'collective'. In this setting, 'the author', as Jasper Griffin has remarked, 'is no more than a nexus between the commissioning patron and the public'.⁵ Since some of the dramas just will not fit and challenge these values, they of course must be 'subversive' or, to put it more neutrally, 'questioning'.⁶ This is enough to make the most Epicurean Latinist believe in reincarnation: Sir Ronald Syme's Augustus, somehow, must have been in charge of fifth-century

1. Griffin 1998, 41, summarizing the views of others at the beginning of his extended critique of this approach to Attic tragedy. Cf. Saïd 1998, esp. 282–4, who offers a useful discussion of recent interpretive trends, and Pelling's (1997, 224–35) sensible remarks on 'tragedy and ideology'.

2. Saïd 1998, 282 n. 83, lists several scholars making this argument.

3. Croally 1994, 18.

4. Cerri 1979, 269: tragedy is a '*vero e proprio apparato ideologico di stato*.'

5. Griffin 1998, 41.

6. See Saïd 1998, 283–4, for various advocates.

Athens (if Pericles pulled up that helmet a little higher we would surely see the distinctive Augustan hair-lock). Conversely, Augustan Rome, in the scholarship of the late 1990s, which is finally reacting against previous decades dominated by similar orthodoxies, seems like a veritable hot-bed of non-conformism, dialogue and mutuality in comparison. It is now viewed as the locus of a cultural rather than a political revolution;⁷ the poets spoke their own minds and advised the emperor;⁸ and the notion of an Augustan propaganda apparatus in the arts was demolished more than a dozen years ago by Paul Zanker in the preface to his *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder*.⁹

Virgil's Appropriation of Greek Tragedy

These interpretative shifts constitute one of several timely reasons for taking a more probing look at Virgil's appropriation of Attic tragedy and at the Roman context of that appropriation. Plenty of *Quellenforschung* shows that Virgil's knowledge of the tragedians is undoubted;¹⁰ in addition, well-known Aristotelian categories such as *hamartia* ('mistake' or, traditionally, 'tragic flaw') have been applied to various Virgilian characters to demonstrate their tragic nature with varying degrees of success.¹¹ Similarly, scholars starting with Heinze have isolated certain aspects of Virgil's narrative as stemming from tragedy (again mostly as defined by Aristotle), such as pity and fear, irony, sympathy, suspense, dramatic juxtapositions and *peripeteia* ('reversal'), to name only the most important.¹² All these points are valuable, but there are aspects of Attic tragedy that are even more central to the essence of the *Aeneid*. One starting-point is that of the final remarks by Gian Biagio Conte on the *Aeneid* in his *History of Latin Literature*:¹³

It is clear that Vergil demands a great deal of his readers. They must simultaneously appreciate the fated necessity of the victory and remember the motives of the defeated; look at the world from a high perspective (Jupiter, fate, the omniscient narrator) and share in the sufferings of the individuals; accept both epic objectivity, which from on high contem-

7. Habinek and Schiesaro 1997.

8. Cf. Woodman and West 1984, 195–201; White 1993; Galinsky 1996.

9. Zanker 1987. The German preface was woefully abridged in the English version and thereby lost much of its substance.

10. König 1970 offers a useful compilation; full bibliography until 1975 in Suerbaum 1980, 267–8. Cf. Hardie 1991 and 1997.

11. E.g. von Albrecht 1970 and Wlosok 1976.

12. See the bibliographical references listed by Hardie 1997, 325.

13. Conte 1994, 284, restated in Conte 1999, 34.

plates the great providential cycle of history, and tragic subjectivity, the quarrel of individual motives and relative truths. At this level, too, and not only at the level of style, Vergil shows that he has profoundly pondered the lesson of the Greek tragedians, from whose influence his poem derives a very marked openness to the problematic elements in life, which renders it different from a typical national epic.

Conte adds, quite correctly in my opinion, that this is the principal reason for the vitality of the reception of the *Aeneid* 'long after the passing away of its Augustan message'.

In other words, 'tragedy' here means the illumination of a given issue or situation from a variety of perspectives and points of view,¹⁴ which may often conflict with one another. I prefer this characterization to J.-P. Vernant's: that 'tragedy turns reality into a problem.'¹⁵ The latter is, alas, a definition that is typically rooted in the academic culture, as academics have an endemic tendency to problematize everything. More importantly, I am in complete agreement with Hardie—and these points are not new—that, instead of being a panegyric, the *Aeneid* is a meditation on the Roman experience, which is in essence what R.D. Williams wrote many years ago: 'The purpose of the *Aeneid* . . . was essentially an exploration of varying and sometimes contrasting aspects of human experience.'¹⁶ In the course of the same essay, he remarked, very aptly, that 'the Roman way of life was one involving constant problems'.¹⁷ In other words, Roman reality was itself problematic. Virgil did not need to problematize it *per se*, and we will look at one conspicuous exception later. Instead, he gave his own unique poetic expression to this problematic reality and hence brought out its dramatic nature by using some of the perspectives and techniques of Attic drama.

To proceed and refine things further: Hardie sees Attic tragedy as the mainshaper of Virgil's technique and the main vehicle for his sensibilities in this regard.¹⁸ Again, I agree with him in principle, though not with some of his detailed applications of this principle. Ever alert to new approaches, Hardie takes his cue from the focus of current interpreters of Attic tragedy and applies it to the *Aeneid*. It is not the behaviour of the individual hero that is problematized, but socio-political issues embodied by various characters. This is, of course, a traditional line of interpretation of Virgil's

14. For a recent textbook illustration apropos of Euripides' *Orestes* see Easterling 1997a, 28–33.

15. Vernant in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988, 33.

16. R.D. Williams 1967, 41. Cf. Pelling 1997, 225 who, exemplifying the reciprocity that underlies my essay, characterizes the *Aeneid* as a 'reflective exploration' and calls for a similar perspective on Attic tragedy.

17. R.D. Williams 1967, 40.

18. Hardie 1997.

epic. According to Hardie, the significance of the Marcellus episode, for instance, is that 'it reveals one of the dangers in a system where the community is dependent on the presence of one great man'.¹⁹ This strikes me as a limited, and limiting, perspective. For the epic to retain its evocative and emotional power, the meaning of such episodes has to be richer and more universal. It is not hard to find it here: Book 6 does not end on the triumphant note of a catalogue of Republican heroes, Augustus or the succinct definition of the Roman national character (847–53), but on a wrenching description of a *mors immatura* ('untimely death'). Loss and grief were a large part of the Roman experience, as they were of the Augustan age in general human terms; as J.A. Crook put it in volume 10 of the *Cambridge Ancient History*: 'Catastrophe following hard on the heels of triumph is an obstinate motif in the story of the age.'²⁰ The motif of the death of the young carries over into the second half of the *Aeneid*. There, it becomes universal rather than forcing us, or the Roman audience, to think back to institutions such as the Greek *ephêbeia* ('training of youths').

The central concern of the current interpreters of Attic tragedy is absolutely valid. Historical, social and cultural context is important, and we have had our share of ahistorical interpretations of the *Aeneid*. At the other end of the spectrum, there are interpretations that see the *Aeneid* solely as a reflection of Augustan institutions. From that perspective, the excessive emphasis on viewing Attic tragedy mostly in institutional terms strikes me as an unnecessary and limiting over-elaboration of Vernant's emphasis on the historical and social circumstances that led to its creation and maintenance, that is, the so-called 'tragic moment'.²¹ At the same time, and in contrast to his epigones, Vernant calls attention not only to the historicity, but also, as he calls it, to the trans-historicity of the tragic subject.²²

The whole interpretative approach is highly relevant to the *Aeneid*. Let me outline it, pick up on some points of affinity, and then look at some examples of Virgil's use of multiple perspectives, especially in his use of Homer, that are similar to the practice of the tragedians.

Vernant locates the 'tragic moment' in the period of change in Athens, starting at the end of the sixth century and related to the growth of, or, as I would put it, the experiment with, democracy. Athens in the year of Aeschylus' death in 456 BC was very different from the Athens of 525 BC. It was a period of political, social and cultural change. This led to a shift in values: whereas Homer emphasized the individual hero fighting for individual

19. Hardie 1997, 318.

20. CAH 10 (1996) 97.

21. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988, 23–8.

22. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988, 237–47.

glory, the new Athenian society stressed commitment, personal responsibility and collective endeavour. Concisely, then, tragedy arises when 'a gap develops at the heart of the social experience. It is wide enough for the oppositions between legal and political thought on the one hand and the mythical and heroic traditions on the other to stand out quite clearly. Yet it is narrow enough for the conflict in values still to be a painful one and for the clash to continue to take place.'²³

Mutatis mutandis, it is exactly at such a juncture that the *Aeneid* was written. In the decades of the late Republic, the political system was changing, and it changed even further under Augustus. Concomitantly, as Wallace-Hadrill and others have documented, it was also a period of profound cultural change, a cultural revolution.²⁴ The clash of values in Augustan Rome has a somewhat different cast from that in fifth-century Athens: there was an attempt to reconnect with, and to revitalize, traditional values that, in fact, stressed responsibility to a collective endeavour rather than an individualistic ethic. Rome had a political and social system in need of updating, and the gap was, indeed, narrow enough for the conflict to be painful and ongoing.

Both Virgil and the tragedians lived at a specific historical juncture full of creative tensions, and both wrote works reflecting, and reflecting on, this experience of their polis and *res publica*. The vehicles they chose for doing so again are similar. These vehicles were not historical tragedy or, in the case of Virgil, historical epic. Greek tragedy started out that way, with the *Fall of Miletus* by Phrynichus. Its author was fined the tidy sum of 1,000 drachmas and forbidden to produce the play—that was one way to end a prospective literary genre, historical tragedy, in democratic Athens. Instead, *muthos* became the subject of tragedy and provided a far more inclusive mode of possible discourse on contemporary issues. Aristotle, of course, has appropriate remarks on the superiority of mythical to historical plots and subjects (*Poetics* 8–9.1451a36–1451b10). As for Rome, historical epic had flourished and the expectation, adumbrated in the proem to the third *Georgic*, was that Virgil would write an *Augusteid*. He chose not to do so and opted for something more inclusive, while sacrificing none of the contemporary relevance of his poem.

At the same time, his epic again is not only in the Homeric tradition, but kindred to Attic tragedy. Take Richard Seaford's characterization: 'Greek tragedy is the dramatization of aetiological myth shaped by the vital need to create and sustain the *polis*.'²⁵ A prevalent pattern that Seaford sees in Greek

23. Vernant, and Vidal-Naquet 1988, 27.

24. Wallace-Hadrill 1997.

25. Seaford 1996, 293.

tragedy is the telling of a story of beginnings, where the old order, usually the resident royal family and their circle, is being superseded, against their will of course, by a new dispensation; think of the *Oresteia*, the *Bacchae* and the *Oedipus*. It is also the pattern of the *Aeneid*: the *aition* ('myth of origin') of the Roman people; the resistance of the resident royals Latinus, Amata and Turnus; the establishment of a new order, including the ratifying of cults, an aspect on which Seaford lays a great deal of emphasis.

The Tragedians' and Virgil's Engagement with Homer

A central characteristic of both Attic tragedy and the *Aeneid* is the engagement with, and appropriation of, Homer. Again, the methods are similar. The tragedians and Virgil both acknowledge Homer and problematize him.²⁶ In the *Odyssey*, Orestes' action is unproblematic. By the time we reach the *Choephoroi*, it becomes a dilemma: 'You killed whom you should not; now suffer what you should not,' says Orestes to Clytemestra (930). It is a central issue of the *Oresteia* and one that is illuminated from a variety of perspectives. Or take Sophocles' *Ajax*. Gone are the straightforward presentation of the hero in the *Iliad* and the singleness of meaning. Instead, three levels of perception are enacted right at the beginning of the play: those of god (Athena), human (Odysseus) and deluded madman (Ajax). Further, the play is permeated by numerous borrowings and evocations from both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. They are constantly re-adapted, adding layer upon layer of association. The encounter of Ajax and Tecmessa evokes that of Hector and Andromache in *Iliad* 6, but it is Tecmessa who uses the language of Hector. The noble implications of the gift-exchange between Hector and Ajax in *Iliad* 7 take on a very different dimension in Sophocles. The sword of Hector becomes the 'butcher', the instrument for Ajax's suicide. Likewise, its counterpart, the sword-belt that Ajax gave to Hector, becomes the instrument for Hector's death; according to Sophocles, Hector was still alive when Achilles tied him, with Ajax's belt, to his chariot and brutally dragged him to death (*Ajax* 1026–37). I will return to this scene shortly in connection with the death of Turnus.

Sophocles' *Ajax* is unique because it recalls specific Homeric scenes more intensely than do any other of the extant tragedies. Bringing to bear multiple perspectives on an issue, and thereby dramatizing it, is a process which is, of course, not limited to Homeric subjects—although they provided a strong impetus—but is prevalent in Attic tragedy in general. The concomitant

26. My discussion in this paragraph is indebted to Gould 1983, 37–9, who offers more detail.

procedure, as Vernant has noted, is the mobilization of different and shifting senses of words as a fundamental dynamic of tragedy; Charles Segal has illustrated this extensively with reference to the *Antigone*.²⁷ To cite Vernant: 'In the language of the tragic writers there is a multiplicity of different levels' that informs each exchange: 'The dialogue exchanged and lived through by the heroes of the drama undergoes shifts in meaning as it is interpreted and commented on by the chorus and taken in and understood by the spectators . . . Words take on opposed meanings depending on who utters them.'²⁸ This is at a salutary remove from the mechanical *modus interpretandi* which presupposes that verbal repetitions in the *Aeneid* have an undifferentiated meaning; clearly, even *furor* ('rage') and *pietas* ('sense of obligation') do not. At the same time, this perspective provides the deeper reason for what the late Don Fowler called 'deviant focalisation' in the *Aeneid*.²⁹ Although the procedure has become a favourite of post-modern interpreters and been used at times with excessive relativism, it does have a firm basis in the technique of Greek tragedy.

Against this interpretative background, I will now focus on Virgil's dramatization, and concomitant problematization, of Homer in the manner of the Greek tragedians. The episode of Nisus and Euryalus is a sterling example. In the *Iliad*, the night expedition of Odysseus and Diomedes is totally unproblematic and is yet another glorious *aristeia* ('heroic exploit'). For good reason, Virgil imparts to this story extensive Homeric colouring; witness especially the scene of the Trojan council with its long speeches and promises of material rewards (9.204–313). Nisus and Euryalus fail in their mission because they indulge in individualistic Homeric bravado rather than act for the greater good of the collective. They come to grief because of a piece of armour, a helmet, that was gained not by chivalrous gift-exchange but by despoliation. And yet, they are *fortunati ambo* ('fortunate, both'; 9.446) and the poet does not withhold his sympathy. As Barbara Pavlock has demonstrated, Virgil combines elements from both the *Iliad* and from Euripides' *Rhesus* to present the salient issues from different perspectives.³⁰ Central among them are the multiple conflicts and levels of meaning of *pietas* to country, family and friend.

While it has received special attention, the Nisus-Euryalus episode is merely emblematic of the larger design of Books 7–12, Virgil's 'Second *Iliad*'.

27. Segal 1964.

28. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988, 42.

29. Fowler 1990.

30. Pavlock 1985.

Virgil's reworking of Homer has been amply noted.³¹ What is important is that Virgil constantly goes beyond intertextual aesthetics.³² The basic situation alone, the seeming reprise of Trojan war in Italy, is not only inverted or adapted, but problematized by being presented from, or by eliciting, various viewpoints: Turnus' and Amata's (who are true believers in cyclical history); the gods', notably Jupiter's with his insight into *fatum*; the shifting identifications of Aeneas and Turnus with Achilles and Hector, starting with the prophecy that there will be an *alius* ('different')—and not *alter* ('another')—Achilles in Latium (*Aen.* 6.89); the poet's own pronouncements, as after the death of Pallas (10.501–5); and the audience's knowledge and foreknowledge. In short, the allusiveness is dramatic. It is a function of the greater complexity of the Roman epic and its times as compared to Homer. In that respect, too, it recalls the manner of Greek tragedians, because their engagement with Homer was also shaped by the greater complexity of their times.

A paradigm of all this is Book 12, which is full of Homeric recalls and rearrangements. I limit myself to a few details.

Aeneid 12 starts with a description of Turnus' state of mind and with a simile comparing him to a wounded lion (*Aen.* 12.1–9):

When Turnus saw that the Latins were crushed by defeat and in lowest
Spirits—saw, too, that all eyes were upon him as if demanding
That now he should make good his promise, he burned with a mood all
the more
Uncompromising; his temper sharpened. Just as an African
Lion, when he's received a bad wound in the breast from the hunters,
Then at last becomes really dangerous, gleefully tosses
The shaggy mane from his neck, and uncowed snaps at the assailant's
Arrow stuck in him, breaks it, roars with his mouth all bloody:
So Turnus looks; his violent intransigence kindles and mounts up.
(C. Day Lewis, 1966 transl.)

Turnus ut infractos aduerso Marte Latinos
defecisse uidet, sua nunc promissa reposci,
se signari oculis, ultro implacabilis ardet
attollitque animos. Poenorum qualis in aruis

31. A classic, and most concise, treatment is still that of Anderson 1957; cf. Cairns 1989. A chapter on Homer is notably absent from Martindale 1997.

32. This seems to me to be a limitation of the otherwise excellent study by Barchiesi 1984, esp. 91ff., to which I am much indebted. Barchiesi repeatedly characterizes Virgil's presentation as 'dramatic' without pursuing the issue further.

saucius ille graui uenantum uulnere pectus
 tum demum mouet arma leo, gaudetque comantis
 excutiens ceruice toros fixumque latronis
 impavidus frangit telum et fremit ore cruento:
 haud secus accenso gliscit uiolentia Turno.

Homer uses a simile of this type for Patroclus (*Iliad* 16.751–4), and in the next episode in the *Iliad* Patroclus dies. The simile, then, points to Turnus' death at the very end of the book. Beginnings, as so often, foreshadow endings. But there is more. Homer applies the simile to Patroclus when he is despoiling an enemy. In contrast, Turnus will die not because he is Patroclus, but because he despoiled the Patroclus of the *Aeneid*, that is Pallas.

A second element of dramatic problematization derives from another Iliadic model for the passage. It is the lion simile at 20.164–75 that is applied to Achilles as he goes into combat against Aeneas:

From the other

side the son of Peleus rose like a lion against him,
 the baleful beast, when men have been straining to kill him, the county
 all in the hunt, and he at first pays them no attention
 and goes his way, only when some one of the impetuous young men
 has hit him with the spear he whirls, jaws open, over his teeth foam
 breaks out, and in the depth of his chest the powerful heart groans;
 he lashes his own ribs with his tail and the flanks on both sides
 as he rouses himself to fury for the fight, eyes glaring,
 and hurls himself straight onward on the chance of killing some one
 of the men, or else being killed himself in the first onrush.
 So the proud heart and fighting fury stirred on Achilles
 to go forward in the face of great-hearted Aeneas.

(Lattimore, 1951 transl.)

Turnus, seemingly, is another Achilles, who will defeat Aeneas, except that it does not turn out that way. This is only the first of several instances where Virgil dramatizes Turnus' situation through the problematic use of Homeric models. Virgil, artfully, prepares for the simile by recalling Turnus' claim that he was not impressed with the Achillean Aeneas: as Servius already noted, Turnus' realization that 'now he should make good his promise' (line 2) goes back to his vaunt at 11.438 that he would confront Aeneas even if Aeneas 'excelled' or 'played the role of great Achilles' (*si magnum praestet Achillem*). That is, in fact, the role Aeneas will play in Book 12, where he is 'excelling' Achilles by acting rather differently, as *alius Achilles*, from the way Achilles acted towards Hector.

The End of Aeneid 12

Similarly, the time has come to give the epic's final scene a reprieve from all the moral sermons that have been preached on it and, without privileging it as 'the key to the *Aeneid*', to consider it from the perspective of problematization and dramatization.³³ Several factors come into play. There are the obvious contrasts with Homer. One is that Aeneas' humane reaction to Turnus' plea differs starkly from Achilles' to Hector's at *Iliad* 22.335–6, 345–54): 'I wish I could hack you into pieces, throw you to the dogs and birds, and eat you raw.'³⁴ At the same time, the horizon of expectations is also defined by the more generic Homeric model: no supplication by a defeated warrior in the *Iliad* is successful.³⁵ At one point, in Book 6.45–65, Menelaus hesitates, but Agamemnon orders him to kill the Trojan suppliant. The additional Roman component is that Turnus was a treaty-breaker, and there is no instance of such individuals being granted *clementia* ('mercy').³⁶ A second contrast is that Achilles' killing of Hector is not placed at the end of the *Iliad*, whereas Priam's successful supplication is. We might invert Vernant's dictum and say that Virgilian reality turns the epic model—the superficially happy end of the *Iliad*—into a problem. Again, it is enhanced by the thematics of supplication and change of mind in Greek tragedy, a subject that has recently been studied perceptively by John Gibert.³⁷ In Attic tragedy, supplications are usually successful and punishment can be revoked. Virgil alludes to this through Aeneas' un-epic hesitation.

33. I am observing the essential distinction between problematization on the basis of the evidence up to Virgil's time, that is the horizon of expectations of the epic's first readers, and problematizations that developed in the course of the poem's later reception on the basis of anachronistic criteria, such as 'the latter-day understanding of *pietas*' (Garrison 1992, 8).
34. Cf. the excellent characterization of the Virgilian scene by Clausen 1987, 99: 'Touched in his inmost being, Aeneas hesitates . . . an extraordinary moment of humanity; for the epic warrior never hesitates.'
35. For a comprehensive discussion of the topic of supplication see Gould 1973 and the important additional analysis by Pedrick 1982; also, Giordano 1999, 120–34. Cf. Barchiesi 1984, 109–11, with the following conclusion: *Se il lettore di Virgilio volge anche qui lo sguardo verso lo sfondo omerico della narrazione, vi riconosce una traccia univoca: Turno non può che essere ucciso* ('If the reader of Virgil casts a look here, too, at the Homeric background of the narration, he recognizes a univocal track: Turnus cannot be but slain'). One distinction, implied in the *Iliad* (e.g. 21.77–82), seems to be that warriors captured before they can offer much resistance (as during a night raid) can be granted a reprieve (such being sold into slavery or ransomed), whereas no supplication is granted after an all-out fight on the battlefield.
36. Cf., supported by the relevant documentation, Traina 1988, 1075: *Dal punto di vista dell'ideologia romana la conclusione dell'Eneide è perfettamente ortodossa* ('From the point of view of Roman ideology the conclusion of the *Aeneid* is perfectly orthodox'); cf. Negri 1999, 241–2. For precedents for baseless supplication and just revenge in *Odyssey* 22 see Pedrick 1982, 134. Turnus is more akin to the Homeric suitors (cf. Cairns 1989, 212–13) than to Priam.
37. Gibert 1995.

As for the immediate Homeric model, this is once more given a problematic twist. Turnus' plea (*Aen.* 12.930–8) is modelled on that of Priam to Achilles (*Iliad.* 24.485–506). But Turnus is no Priam. His attempt to usurp the role of Priam is even less credible than his endeavour to cast himself as another Achilles; both attempts exemplify his self-delusion and end in failure. To drive the point home, Virgil transposes the authentic equivalent of Priam's supplication of Achilles to the beginning of Book 12 where the old king Latinus pleads with the impetuous young warrior to end the bloodshed (lines 18–45).³⁸ It is an appropriate sequel to Turnus' pretension to be Achilles, suggested by the initial lion simile. Once more, he is shown not to be that: if he were the true Achilles, he would listen to Latinus/Priam's plea and accede to it. Instead, his *uiolentia* ('violent temper') 'is not being bent in any way' (*haudquaquam . . . flectitur*; 45f.). When Turnus, therefore, arrogates to himself the role of Priam for his plea to Aeneas—who is listening and beginning to 'bend' (*flectere*, 940)—he is not only guilty of a double standard but also engages in a poor imitation both of Priam's supplication of Achilles and its reprise, which has already taken place at the beginning of the book. The connection between the Homeric supplication-scene and the two Virgilian reworkings in *Aeneid* 12 is reinforced by verbal echoes:

Reflect on the changing ways of war. Take pity on your aged father who in his grief is cut off in his native Ardea.

respice res bello uarias, miserere parentis
longaeui, quem nunc maestum patria Ardea longe
diuidit.

(*Aen.* 12.43–5)

If care for a father's grief can touch you—and you too had such a father in Anchises—I beg you, take pity on Daunus' old age . . .

miseri te si qua parentis
tangere cura potest, oro (fuit et tibi talis
Anchises genitor) Dauni miserere senectae . . .

(*Aen.* 12.934–6)

Homer, *Il.* 24.485–7, 503–4:

38. We might note that impetuous, short-sighted young men and older, wise kings are also staple characters in Attic tragedy.

But now Priam spoke to him in the words of a suppliant:
 'Godlike Achilles, remember your father, one who
 is of years like mine, and on the door-sill of sorrowful old age.

Honour then the gods, Achilles, and *take pity [eleêson] upon me*
 remembering your father, yet I am still more pitiful.'

(Lattimore 1951 transl.)

Virgil recasts Priam's plea in such a way as to create several problematic disjunctions for Turnus. Turnus' appropriation of this Homeric matrix points up the gap between reality and delusion and between authenticity and imitation; hence, Turnus needs to overcompensate by pleading in the names of both Aeneas' father and his, which only prompts the reader to recall Turnus' earlier and vehement rejection of Latinus' Priam-like appeal in the name of Turnus' father. The echoes extend yet further, linking the themes of Turnus' Achillean pretensions and of his artificial assumption of the role of Priam. At a climactic point in Book 9 (741–2), he sneered at Pandarus before dispatching him to Hades:

Step forward if you have the heart for it.
 Come within range. You will be telling Priam
 Achilles has been found again, and here.

(Fitzgerald, 1983 transl.)

incipi, si qua animo uirtus, et consere dextram,
 hic etiam inuentum Priamo narrabis Achillem.

So far from being another Priam, Turnus identifies with Pyrrhus,³⁹ an analogy that is also relevant to Aeneas' action in the final scene.⁴⁰

All these are elements in the literary problematization of an issue that is intrinsically unproblematic, namely the punishment of the treaty-breaker Turnus (cf. Servius *ad Aen.* 12.949: *ad rupti foederis ultionem*).

Pertinent to this is the treatment of revenge in Greek tragedy, where it was a major theme. It has been well discussed by Anne Burnett in her recent Sather Lectures (and before her, by Judith Mossman),⁴¹ and the applicability of her findings to the *Aeneid*, including her demonstration of 'moral colonialism' on the part of modern moralizers, could be developed in detail. In brief—and the connection to the *Aeneid* is evident without having to be

39. See Hardie's (1994) commentary *ad loc.*

40. Traina 1988, 99, with reference to *Aen.* 2.535 and 12.949; Heuzé 1985, 151.

41. Burnett 1998; Mossman 1995.

laid out point by point—Burnett points out that ‘among early Greeks revenge was not a problem but a solution . . . [nor was it] a problem for Athenian society in the early fifth century, but precisely for that reason it was an action full of difficulties for a dramatist . . . and yet its characteristic passion—anger—cried out for poet and actor.’ Hence it had to be dramatized, often as ‘a kind of metatheater’.⁴² This fits the *Aeneid* perfectly: the act of revenge (*ultio*), which in the case of Aeneas has both private and public aspects, is not intrinsically a ‘problem’, but Virgil, ever the follower of the Attic tragedians, chose to dramatize it, starting, as we have seen, with Aeneas’ hesitation, which is virtually unparalleled in epic, but common in tragedy.

To provide a further perspective on this, Virgil uses yet another Homeric motif. The treaty ceremony (*Aen.* 12.161–215), on which Virgil deliberately spends so much time to highlight its thematic importance, recalls the Homeric model of the treaty in *Iliad* 3, providing an end to the war through the duel of Menelaos and Paris. Through the intervention of Venus, Aeneas’ mother, Paris defaults on that duel and the war goes on. Turnus, by contrast, breaks the truce (*foedus*) without divine intervention, although he, too, is spirited away from the battlefield. The end of Book 12, then, recalls not only the combat of Achilles and Hector. Rather, Turnus, who considered Aeneas to be the reincarnation of the bride-snatching Paris in Italy, is himself assimilated to Paris with respect to Paris’ guilt for starting the Trojan war and for prolonging it; we again confront the entire story of the *Iliad*. As always, there is an important variation: whereas Homer simply says that Aphrodite pulled Paris from the duel in a dark cloud of mist (*Il.* 3.381), the divine interference in *Aeneid* 12 is purely man-made. The Latins are looking for a reason to negate the *foedus* for Turnus’ sake; Juturna produces an omen, and the augur Tolumnius produces a self-serving interpretation (259): ‘That was it! That is what I have often been looking for in my prayers’ (*hoc erat, hoc uotis quod saepe petiui*). The whole thematics of human actions, their consequences, the responsibility that must be taken for them, and the role of all this in a larger than human scheme of things are, of course, basic to both Homer and Attic tragedy.

For good reasons, therefore, we find marked references to, and motifs from, Greek tragedy at both the beginning and the end of the *Aeneid*. Within the scope of this essay, I can outline them only briefly: (1) Deviating from Homer, Virgil postpones the invocation to the Muse until line 8, and then introduces a cardinal theme from Greek tragedy (8–11): the question of divine justice and deserved or undeserved human suffering. This is followed (up to line 296) by a device also adapted from the Attic tragedians, an

42. Burnett 1998, xvi–xvii.

exposition and anticipation of the action by means of a prologue. (2) As for the epic's end, the evocation of themes from Greek tragedy rises to a level of intensity that seems almost meta-poetic in intent. To the tragic echoes that I have already mentioned we can add three more. First (a), the fact that the belt of Turnus, taken from Pallas, recalls that of Hector in Sophocles' *Ajax* (1028–39):⁴³

Only consider this
 Amazing thing, the fortunes of two men:
 The warrior's belt Hector had as Ajax's gift
 Was that which dragged him from the chariot rails,
 Clamping his flesh and grating him until
 He swooned in death; this sword Hector gave Ajax,
 Who perished on it with a death-fraught fall.
 Did not a Fury [*Erimus*] beat this weapon out?
 And was it not Hades, that grim craftsman,
 Who made the other one? In my opinion,
 This was the gods' contrivance [*mêchanan*], like all other
 Destinies of men, for the gods weave them all.
 But if anyone should find my thought at fault,
 Let him keep his opinions, and I mine.

(J. Moore, 1957 transl.)

As we saw earlier, Ajax gave his sword-belt to Hector in exchange for Hector's sword. These weapons ultimately seal the doom of both warriors. Hence, Teucer calls the sword that of a Fury (*Erinys* 1034); Aeneas is 'inflamed by furies' (*furiis accensus*, *Aen.* 12.946). That Virgil had the Sophoclean scene in mind seems confirmed by the fact that Sophocles deviated from Homer by presenting Hector as *not* having been mortally wounded by Achilles; the situations of the Sophoclean Hector and Virgil's Turnus are analogous. (b) A second point is related to this issue. Philip Hardie, referring to his discussion of the *Aeneid* and the *Oresteia*, raises the possibility that *furiis* might be understood as *Furiis* with a capital 'F'.⁴⁴ Certainly, the echo of the end of the *Oresteia* is relevant: the Furies will have a place in the new *polis* precisely because their fury will not cease and will still instill fear, but for a beneficent purpose, that is, the maintenance of the

43. The passage is not mentioned in Negri's (1999) comprehensive listing of affinities between Turnus and characters in Greek tragedy.

44. Hardie 1997, 315, with reference also to Hardie 1991.

new order.⁴⁵ It is evident even at this point how much richer the implications of the *Aeneid's* final scene are than simple, familiar claims that Aeneas somehow falls from grace or that the *Aeneid* is 'tragic' because he does not kill Turnus in cold blood.

A third point (c) reinforces this reading of the scene. The phrase *Pallas te immolat* ('Pallas sacrifices you', *Aen.* 12.948) agrees well with the ritual connection of Attic tragedy and can be fitted, as several scholars have shown, into René Girard's theory of the ritual victim and of sacrifice as a social process.⁴⁶ Also, the function of the Danaids on the sword-belt is meta-poetic or generically self-reflexive at this point (this does not exclude other interpretations): the Danaid trilogy of Aeschylus was a paradigm of the kind of terrible dilemma and violence that are at the centre of so many Attic tragedies. Its echo is all the more poignant as the first play of the trilogy included a supplication that was successful.

The presence of these poetic and meta-poetic elements at the conclusion of the *Aeneid* strongly suggests that one of its purposes is to serve as a *sphragis* (seal), a final restatement of Virgil's poetic aims. In fact, this is to be fully expected in view of Virgil's own practice in the *Eclogues* and *Georgics* and the practice of the other Augustan poets. Virgil's literary aim was to be a second Homer, but the Homeric material is manipulated, rearranged, dramatized and problematized in the manner of the Greek tragedians. The final book of this new epic and its closure are fitting paradigms of this process.

Three more aspects of the general subject deserve to be mentioned briefly. The first is that the tragedians' and Virgil's engagement with Homer does not simply exhaust itself in irony, subversion or inversion. As we know from Plato, for instance, Homer's hold on fifth-century audiences was still considerable (*Ion* 535b–e) and Socrates, in his *Apology* (28b–d), cites the example of Achilles and other Iliadic heroes when he talks about an honourable death. Also, we have to be on guard not to de-homerize the *Aeneid* excessively especially in regard to its warrior ethos. Second, the tragedians were the true heirs of Homer because the *Iliad*, in particular, already contains core tragic themes. Examples are the characters and actions of Achilles and Hector, and issues such as personal responsibility, or human blindness versus foreknowledge on the part of the gods or the audience.⁴⁷ Unsurprisingly, therefore, Homer and the tragedians are frequently lumped

45. Cf. the suggestion by Spence (1999, 158ff.) that Aeneas' double invocation of Pallas (*Aen.* 12.948) refers to both Evander's son and the goddess. She concludes (161): 'Turnus is sacrificed to Pallas and his groan places his spirit arguably beneath the earth where he and Camilla will enrich the soil of Rome as the Augustan Eumenides.'

46. See Hardie 1994, 19ff.; Fowler 1997, 33.

47. For detailed discussions see e.g. Rutherford 1982 and Gould 1983.

together by our ancient sources, especially Plato.⁴⁸ In Hellenistic literary criticism, this affinity took on a more specific expression: all literary genres were said to derive from Homer; he was the 'Ocean' from whom all literary traditions flowed.⁴⁹

Virgil and Roman Drama

That is one of the underlying reasons for Virgil's appropriation of tragedy back into epic. Another, that brings me to Peter Wiseman and Roman drama, was the condition of tragedies on the Roman stage by his time.⁵⁰ Their production had basically dwindled away. Besides, in the late Republic they had evolved more and more into showy spectacles at the cost of intellectual content. A concomitant development was their evolution into praise poetry. Panegyric commemoration of great victories and the like marked the purpose of both Roman epic and Roman tragedy in the decades before Virgil; after all, it was an *imperator* such as Pompey who built the first permanent theatre, a lavish setting for lavish productions. In his *Letter to Augustus* (*Epist.* 2.1), Horace complained about the ostentation of theatrical productions—including the famous white elephants—and their dearth of literary substance; clearly, here Augustan Rome fell short of one of its cultural models, fifth-century Athens. But Horace did not rush out and try to revive meaningful tragedy. Virgil, by contrast, did so in his own way. He revived both tragedy and epic by combining them as a modern Homer. In the process, he enriched both genres, as is clear from both Ovid's *Medea* and Seneca on the one hand,⁵¹ and the post-Augustan epic poets on the other,⁵² to say nothing of the later epic and tragic tradition. As the tragedians had done in Athens, Virgil creatively seized the tragic moment of Rome and gave it timeless vitality.

The whole context and framework I have sketched are enriched by Peter Wiseman's hypothesis that from early times dramatic performances in Rome constituted a central medium for informing the Romans about their past and shaping their identity. Moreover, as he argues, several of these traditions, notably that of Rome's foundation story, found their way into Roman

48. Most famously in *Republic* 10.595c1–2 (Homer as 'teacher and leader [*hêgemôn*] of the tragedians') and 607a3 ('first of the tragedians'); cf. 605c. Further *testimonia* include Aristotle, *Poet.* 4.1448b38–9, 8.51a22–30, 23.59a29–34; Athenaeus 8.347e. See also Halliwell 1996, 340–2.

49. Documentation in F. Williams 1978, 87–9, 98–9.

50. A recent useful discussion is Goldberg 1996.

51. Tarrant 1978.

52. Hardie 1994.

historiography through drama.⁵³ The relevance of this posited background to Virgil's national epic lies precisely in the aspects that he has singled out and that I have just mentioned. I comment on them briefly by way of conclusion.

It is obvious that Virgil's inspirations for his myth-historical epic were multiple and not limited simply to previous epics, whether Greek or Roman. Leaving aside Greek tragedy (albeit with Philip Hardie's summary observation that 'it was the single most important factor in Virgil's successful revitalization of the genre of epic')⁵⁴ we find, of course, quite a few echoes of Roman tragedy, too, in the *Aeneid*. This has been well documented by Michael Wigodsky, especially in the areas of mythographic information and verbal parallels.⁵⁵ Peter Wiseman's arguments, however, add a whole new dimension to the prevalence of drama and dramatization in the *Aeneid*. Virgil, in that case—and in my opinion it is a plausible case, even if I am bothered by the lack of wholly definitive evidence—was drawing on a vital Roman tradition. Once more, the dramatic element in his epic turns out to be more than a merely aesthetic or literary device. The same heritage may also be the deeper reason for the adaptation of scenes from Virgil's poetry, including the *Aeneid*, on the Roman stage. The popularity of such adaptations is attested until the time of Augustine;⁵⁶ 'few of you know him from books,' he addresses his listeners (*Serm.* 241.5), 'many know him from the theatre' (*pauci nostis in libris; multi in theatris*). Martial calls him simply 'Virgil in buskins' (*Maro cothurnatus*; 5.5.8, 7.63.5). Similarly, Seneca (*Suas.* 3.7) attests Ovid's appropriation of the *Aeneid* not only for the *Metamorphoses*, but also for his *Medea*:

... as a result, [Ovid] did something he had done with many other lines of Virgil—with no thought of plagiarism, but meaning that his piece of open borrowing should be noticed. And in his tragedy you may read [a verse from the *Medea* follows (fr. 2 Ribbeck)].

itaque fecisse illum [i.e. Ovidium] quod in multis aliis uersibus Vergilii fecerat, non subripiendi causa, sed palam mutuandi, hoc animo ut uellet agnosci; esse autem in tragoedia eius . . .

Again, this may well refer not just to verbal borrowings, but rather to the recognition, on Ovid's part, of Virgil's dramatic technique.⁵⁷ He found it

53. Wiseman 1995 and 1998.

54. Hardie 1998, 62.

55. Wigodsky 1972; cf. Zorzetti 1990, 245–7 (list of known allusions).

56. Details in Horsfall 1995, 249–50.

57. Cf. Fantham's (1975) similar argument concerning Seneca's *Phaedra* and Virgil's *Dido*.

congenial for his drama, which was rated by Quintilian as one of the very best Roman tragedies (10.1.98).

While the Ovidian example may be more pertinent to Virgil's appropriation of Greek tragedy, the posited existence of a popular dramatic tradition in Rome also adds to our understanding of the continuity of Roman tragedy in the early principate. That means, principally, Seneca, and we should note that Richard Tarrant, for one, has argued forcefully for Augustan antecedents of Seneca's plays not only in terms of poetic style, but also of characterization and thematic ideas.⁵⁸ The perspective is more comprehensive than that of Sander Goldberg who, in a recent article entitled 'The Fall and Rise of Roman Tragedy', concludes that, amid the change from stage performance to recitation, tragedy was revitalized by its new reliance on language, because the new medium 'asserted the primacy of language over spectacle'.⁵⁹ We need, however, to be attentive to both the medium and the substance. A good example is Seneca's *Thyestes*, which Goldberg uses as a paradigm. As has been well recognized, it is in a many ways a play about contemporary realities, such as the mentality of the unbridled autocrat and the attempts of his counsellor (*satelles*) to cope with this mentality. In its combination of mythical form and contemporary content, the play reaches back to both Attic tragedy and, more immediately, to the *Aeneid*. Like the *Aeneid*, it is a medium for self-fashioning and for shaping cultural identity. That was precisely one of the functions of the Roman dramatic tradition as posited by Peter Wiseman. This convergence or, to put it differently, these shared goals of the popular dramatic tradition in Rome and Rome's intended national epic are another central reason for the presence of the dramatic element in the *Aeneid*.

There are two further strands of convergence that stand out. One is the propagation of historical traditions which, to be sure, were problematized by Virgil in the manner of Greek tragedy. Just as important, the popularity of these performances provided a model for the *Aeneid*. Virgil's emulation was successful: the copious evidence for the immediate reception and resonance of the *Aeneid* comes not only from the literati but also from non-élite groups.⁶⁰

A quarter-century ago, David Ross published his *Backgrounds to Augustan Poetry*.⁶¹ It was mostly about Gallus, of whose poetry we had just one verse at the time, a verse that, as one savant is reputed to have claimed, was not typical of Gallus. The creation of the Roman historical tradition that Peter

58. Tarrant 1978, 258 ff.

59. Goldberg 1996, 276.

60. Full documentation in Horsfall 1995, 249ff.

61. Ross 1975.

Wiseman has posited is important both in its own right and as a background to Augustan poetry and, fortunately, this is based on a more substantial body of evidence than one verse.

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