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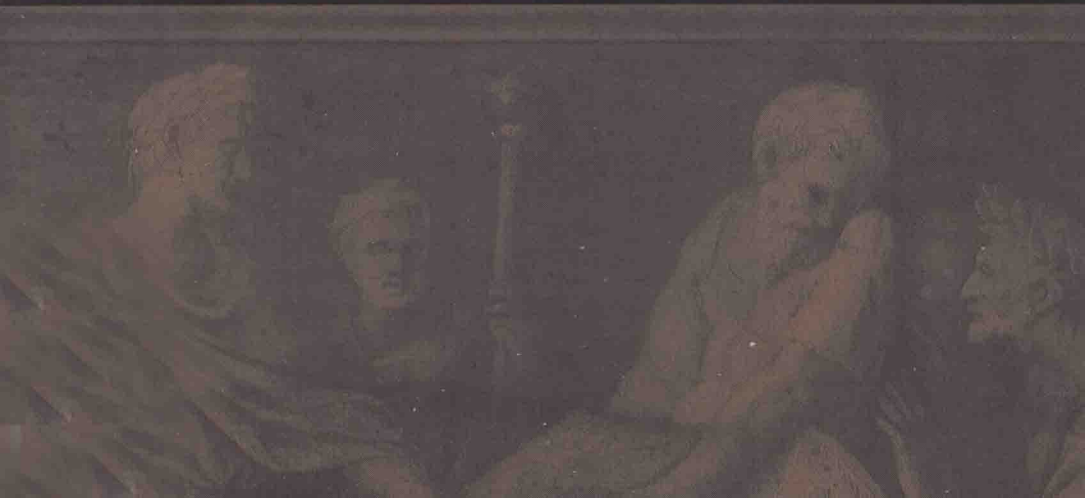

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ERRATUM

The author and the publisher very much regret an error in the displayed quotation on page 292, reproduced from Karl Galinsky, "The anger of Aeneas," *AJP* 109 (1988) 323. Lines 8–13 of the displayed quotation from "suspends them from his chariot" to ". . . thug" should have been in quotation marks since they are themselves quoted by Galinsky. The citation for these lines was also omitted: M. M. Willcock, "Battle Scenes in the Aeneid," *PCPS* 209 n.s. 29 (1983) 94.

September 2001

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PROLOGUE

As one long convinced that much of the power and the beauty of Virgilian poetry lies in the profound qualifications of the poet's vision of the political and cultural worlds that his poetry engages, I used to be uncomfortable with the possibility that this view was somehow related to my opposition to the involvement of my country (New Zealand at that point) in an illegal and unjust war in Vietnam. Indeed, as a good classicist, I even felt a little guilty as I read such comments as "the damage suffered by the interpretation of Roman poetry has consisted largely of the Vietnam war being imposed on the wars of Aeneas in Italy."[1] One scholar even responded to some offprints I sent with the admonition that "it don't help to use the sort of language that goes back to the worst years of Vietnam or the Spanish civil war." But since my convictions about the darkness of Virgil's vision, far from abating, only developed as I read, taught and wrote about this author, and since I continued to be unhappy with the proposition that these views were just the product of my days as a Vietnam war protester, which were after all becoming somewhat remote, I decided to go looking for my Virgil elsewhere in the Virgil tradition, hoping that he might have flourished also in other ages. I found him here and there, but, more importantly, I found him being suppressed and avoided, replaced by something else, and transformed into what I will be calling the "Augustan Virgil." E. L. Edmunds, in a review of C. Martindale, notes that "the hermeneutic approach to a text must begin with one's own horizon. One's own reading comes first."[2] By positioning my own reading of Virgil in, and following, a tradition of

[1] Galinsky (1992) 32. We are given no representative examples of the golden age of Virgilian criticism obtaining in 1964 before the damage was inflicted.

[2] Edmunds (1994) 39.

other readings, some of which are hard to recover, I hope to show the pervasiveness of that Virgil, and not just in the imagination of fellow-travellers from the 1960s and 1970s.

"The history of Vergilian scholarship," writes H. P. Stahl, "repeatedly shows how the individual scholar was tied to political and sociological perceptions of his own time."[3] On the next page, on which he too refers to the influence of Vietnam (as grounds for dismissing the non-Augustan Virgil), he will answer his own question about the morality of the character of Aeneas by referring to Turnus' and Dido's having "sinned against the divine order of the universe" – a phrase I would be interested to see put into Virgilian Latin![4] Against the usual assumption that it is the darker reading of Virgil that is the modern construction, much of this book will attempt to demonstrate that the Augustan Virgil is likewise a political and sociological construction, and is potentially no more exempt from the creative manipulations and transformations of reception than the non-Augustan Virgil. We will see that experiences other than Vietnam, such as French and English imperialism, Prussian expansionism, Italian and German nationalism, fascism and Nazism all play a role in the construction.

By "Augustan reader" I mean a reader who sees the writings of Virgil as endorsements of the aims and achievements of Imperator Caesar Divi filius Augustus (as he would eventually be called),[5] endorsements generated either by Virgil's own political and ideological conviction or by the application of external suggestion, chiefly from his "patron" Maecenas; that is, a reader who takes from Virgil what Augustus himself would presumably have wanted a contemporary reader to take. Although for strategic reasons Augustan readers prefer to label the other way of reading Virgil as "pessimism," I prefer, and will use, the term "ambivalence," occasionally "oppositional," and sometimes "non-Augustan." There are two reasons for my choice (which is not new; the word "pessimism" is not, for instance, to be found in the introduction of my 1988 commentary on the *Georgics*): first, it allows for a duality, even a conflict, and this makes it truer to the poetry of Virgil, as many would agree, and second, because the

[3] Stahl (1990) 178. We will return to the issue of contemporary politics and interpretation in Chs. 7 and 8.

[4] Augustan Virgilians tend to level the accusation of Christian anachronism, but the shoe is frequently on the other foot.

[5] On the name, see Syme (1979) 365, 370.

term "pessimistic" is false to the poetic power that Virgil achieves when he looks away, as he so often does, from victor to vanquished, or focuses his lens on the price involved in the establishment of Augustanism. Roman *humanitas* may lack the teleology that makes Christian suffering and darkness tolerable, but that does not deprive such Virgilian moments of their grandeur. "Pessimism," moreover, is a term anachronistically rooted in Augustanism, and colored by modern political ideology, particularly the ideology of the establishment of the 1960s and subsequent neo-conservative Reaganism and Thatcherism. Virgil's political "optimism" would constitute optimism about the achievements and possibilities of Augustus. But there is no Augustus until after the *Aeneid* is under way, and it is reasonable to suppose that it would be long after the death of Virgil that the lasting political achievements of Octavian would compensate for his ruthless and opportunistic earlier years.[6]

Nor am I denying that there was a historical Augustan Virgil, to match and generate the Augustan reader of Virgil. That too is in the nature of ambivalence. But here I quote from an article I wrote a few years ago:

> In legislative terms, that is in terms of requiring single, unitary ideological intent and meaning, there is a huge and qualitative difference between the Augustans and the ambivalents. Put quite simply the latter can live with interpretations of these poems, or at least parts of them, that are directed at uncovering ideologies coincident with those of Aeneas and Augustanism. That, of course, is in large part because nobody would deny that the poetry of the 30s and 20s BC, Virgil's and that of others, participates to a great extent and much of the time positively in the revolution of those years. But the ambivalents also accept such interpretations because it is in the nature of ambivalence that it must work in tension with some other, generally less subliminal, meaning; otherwise it becomes mere pamphleteering and subversion. However, given the position of Virgil (and others) within Augustan society, the Augustan critic cannot accept any ambivalence: the slightest reservations expressed by a "client" of Maecenas open up a Pandora's box which must be kept closed for the preservation of the official

[6] For further criticism of this terminology, and of a recent study on pessimism and optimism in the *Georgics*, see Thomas (2000a), and below, Ch. 6, pp. 218–21.

> status of the purely Augustan poet. Once one moves from a naive Augustan reading to a complex, ambivalent one, there is ultimately no way for the former to exist, for the latter will undercut it and vitiate its purity, the essence of its existence. So it is, I think, that we must be forbidden to countenance the latter, ambivalent or pessimistic reading.[7]

I shall assume nothing in advance about the relationship between Virgil and Octavian, Virgil and Augustus, Virgil and Horace, Virgil and Maecenas. With respect to Virgil and Octavian/Augustus, in particular, the struggle must be to recreate a series of synchronic readings, to recreate hypothetical worlds in which to situate those readings, for the *Eclogues* a world in which Octavian could have died at some time around 35 BC, between 35 and 29 for any given line of the *Georgics*, and for the *Aeneid* a world in which the Augustan principate ended in 19 BC, half a lifetime or more before it consolidated its words and images, and created the Roman empire and laid the foundations of western civilization. Even Ovid's reference to the *Aeneid* as Augustus' poem (*Trist.* 2.533), however it is interpreted, must be seen as an utterance of 9 AD, a generation after the death of Virgil, during which years the political reception and use of the poem will have helped turn it into "Augustus' poem." That is of interest, as a matter of reception, but that should not be confused with circumstances of composition.

It is my assumption throughout that Virgil's poetry is constantly and unrelievedly grappling with the problems of existence in a troubled and violent world, and that this is the case, before, during and after the political "solutions" to civil discord that he observed as he was finishing the *Georgics*. I will not always or systematically argue for such a reading, but will always assume it, frequently argue for it, and look for the suppression of it in the varied and complex reception of this poet. Some will therefore find critical imbalance here. This is, of course, an occupational hazard of the publishing Virgilian, but it is also, I hope, a sign of the continuing, and even growing, vitality of this poet: he clearly matters to those who are capable of reading him.

There is no single or even consistent theoretical stance in this book. I have tended to look for such help wherever it seemed most applicable

[7] Thomas (1990) 66. I think this is the last time I used the term "pessimistic," which I here renounce as an Augustan rhetorical strategy!

and most productive, perhaps, at the risk of self-aggrandizement, like Horace at *Epistles* 1.1.14 (*nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri* "submitting myself to the oath of no master"). It does not much matter, for my purposes, whether what I will mostly call ambiguity (one of the tropes by which ambivalence may be established) is called by others diphony, polyphony, polysemy, competing point of view, or complication of the epic norm.[8] Since I am not much interested in theory detached from hermeneutics, I permit myself an eclecticism here that will strike some as theoretically naive. My methods have tended to be historicist, and they look for their support to philology, broadly defined, so as to include, for instance, narratology, reception criticism, some deconstruction, and an occasional dose of new historicism (p. 166). In places the target is also philology, particularly those manifestations of philology which are most assertive about their ability to establish texts and define meanings so as to create Augustan monophony. This is a nuanced enterprise, but it is hardly new in Virgilian studies: V. Pöschl began his influential study of Virgil by opposing himself to the rationalism of "philology."[9] I will join him in suggesting that positivism and false science have indeed distorted the picture, but will differ in insisting that clarity can come only through broadly defined philology.

In an often quoted epigram, T. Eagleton has noted that hostility to theory "usually means an opposition to other people's theories and an oblivion of one's own."[10] Likewise hostility to philology connotes unawareness or denial of one's own philological connections, and has in recent years been a symptom of political academic anxiety more than anything else. Everyone who talks about literature, particularly literature in a foreign language which has no surviving native speakers, is functioning as a philologist, and insisting on one's status as "literary" or renaming the enterprise "close reading" (which is then regarded as a discrete act, or part-time job) will not obscure that fact.

Particularly in the area of reception it has been of help to return constantly to the words of Virgil, and to scrutinize those words against the meanings that have been assigned to them, as against other

[8] See Martindale (1993b) 121–8 on the variety in recent use of critical terminology for expressing "ambiguity." There are of course real distinctions, and I have addressed this in Thomas (2000b), arguing for the unsuitability of "polysemy" to describe ambiguity.

[9] Pöschl (1977) 3–7.

[10] Eagleton (1983) viii.

possible meanings that they might have. Where this approach leads to different conclusions from those that have been part of the critical orthodoxy, it may perhaps be characterized as vaguely deconstructive – a characterization that surprises me less now than it did when it was levelled at me some years ago. C. Martindale has referred to deconstruction "at its best" as a "mode of *defamiliarization*, designed to provoke us into fresh apprehensions of fresh possibilities of meaning."[11] One review of my *Georgics* commentary ended by stating "This is not the poem that I have been reading and rereading" – an utterance which I find quite heartening, since that was really my aim.[12] To the degree that my findings partake of such defamiliarization, but at the same time may be seen to stake some claim to philologically determined stability, I would position myself in what J. M. Ziolkowski has desiderated as "a middle ground between the deconstructive aims of some theory and the reconstructive project of all philology."[13] Ultimately, poststructuralist theory and philology may not be inimical, but rather function together, in which case such theory becomes a part of the philological enterprise.

Philological scrutiny, then, is perhaps the most useful tool for scrutinizing the reception of Virgil. But the procedures are delicate and the path is a rocky one, for at the same time philology, and the excessive positivism that has often accompanied it, have been prominent players in the construction of the Augustan Virgil. I have also tried throughout to relate philological observation to hermeneutics. It is sometimes claimed that the interpretation of large-scale narrative must turn from the detail, from the trees, and keep in mind the forest and its general aspect. The ways in which this is true are obvious and I have tried to avoid becoming preoccupied by philological detail for its own sake – diverting as that may be. But the ways in which that claim is false or misleading are more subtle: criticism which frees itself from attention to detail, particularly when the subject of study is Virgil, is in my view likely to go astray, for the writer starts thinking of the (Augustan) reception of Virgil rather than of Virgil. There is a great deal in that reception to distract the critic from the Virgilian text, not the least Augustus and Rome, or constructions of Augustus and Rome. And the hermeneutic circle becomes a particular likelihood when dealing with the triad Virgil, Augustus, Rome, in which

[11] Martindale (1993a) 36. [12] Fantham (1991) 167. [13] Ziolkowski (1990) 11.

group Augustus and Rome have always been the dominant partners, into whose service the poet and his poems are pressed.

Two objections may present themselves at this point: first, it may be doubted that we can ever establish an "original" climate of reading, or that there ever was such a thing; second, and related, it may be felt that I am just replacing one imposed construct with another, claiming that my philology works better than the philology of others. Both are legitimate and raise fundamental critical issues. To the latter I can only say that the proof of the pudding lies ahead, and the test can only come through an eventual judgment of individual examples. To the former, I would respond in similar vein, but also add the fact that although different readings of poetic texts are always possible, and can coexist, it will be useful to explore the potential gap between readings that are historically plausible in terms of the culture that produced the text and those that are demonstrably generated by the cultures that received it. For that reason I will constantly and with sustained scepticism question the role of reception, which is to say the collective interpretations that have accumulated in the last 2000 years.[14] Whether this allows reification of a synchronically legible Virgilian text, and whether that is something we should even be striving towards, will depend in part on the tastes of the reader. But I hope the process of deconstructing the reception, as well as the attempt to construct, will be of interest.

It is a premise of this book that Virgil's oeuvre is ideologically complete and susceptible to interpretation.[15] There will be no tolerance for the position, frequently used to explain away ambiguity or troubling passages, that Virgil would have removed this or that passage. What may be known with some degree of certainty about most of his text is that he wrote what he wrote, and that is what we must read, and read as his work. It may well be that the dynamism of the *Aeneid* lies partly in the fact that he did not have those three years to "polish" it, and if so, it is certainly not the task of the critic, with a fully formed Augustus looking over his shoulder, to do that polishing in his place. This, for instance, J. W. Mackail attempted to do when

[14] The connection between interpretation and reader reception is well treated by Kallendorf (1994).

[15] By this I do not mean to deny the ideological complexity that characterizes Virgilian poetry.

he wrote of Aeneas' venture into human sacrifice in *Aeneid* 11: "One can say it is Virgil's [not Aeneas', we note] single lapse into barbarism, and think or hope that the two lines might have been cancelled in his final revision."[16] And as we shall see in Chapter 6, there is a long tradition of critical "emendation" and latterly athetization aimed at turning Virgil into a more truly Augustan poet.

It has been particularly useful, occasionally and again in no organized way, to think in narratological terms, an approach that may help to de-Augustanize Virgil. I have tended to use the term "focalization" at some times, "voice" at others, and though I would agree with Farrell that the voices or focalizations can coexist in unresolved competition (with which Parry too would surely have agreed), the fact is that in this poem the Augustan voice will generally be subverted by the "other" voice or voices.[17] On a very fundamental level, it will be useful, and a corrective, to attend to the identity of the voice in question, something which critics have frequently failed to do. All would agree that identifying the narrative voice with that of Turnus or Mezentius is scarcely a legitimate critical procedure. Given the fact that the *Aeneid* is primarily the story of Aeneas, it may seem more legitimate, prima facie, to identify the narrative voice with the voices of Anchises or Aeneas, but such an identification is still hazardous, for there is always a gap between narrator and character. Statements expressed by characters, even, or perhaps especially, when the character is a figure such as Jupiter, need to be interpreted as representing a particular point of view, and one which can never be simply identified with the point of view of the author.[18] This may all seem obvious, but the fact is that throughout the last two millennia, readers of Virgil have just assumed that the voice of the Augustan character is the voice of the Virgilian narrator and of Virgil himself. Neither of these assumptions is any more legitimate than the assumption that the voice of any particular character in a play of

[16] Mackail (1922) 105.

[17] Thomas (1990) 66. Also Farrell (1990) 77–80 for a reformulating of the issue in terms of Bakhtinian polyphony.

[18] See Galinsky (1996) 239–40 for treatment of Jupiter as a quasi-authorial character. In reality the god's words in the passage in question (10.112 *rex Iuppiter omnibus idem* "King Jupiter is the same to all") are deeply troubling, in that Jupiter is *not* the same to all, and had already prophesied the success of Aeneas, whom he will actively support in the duel with Turnus. For good treatment of the "characterful" aspect of Jupiter in these lines, see Feeney (1991) 143–6 and generally 129–87.

Sophocles, Terence or Shakespeare has an identity with that of the poet.

The Virgilian narrative voice, unlike that of Horace, for instance, never makes its point by preaching or drawing conclusions, and even in the *Georgics* does not instruct so much as demonstrate – demonstrate systems, the fates of cultures, the consequences and implications of actions. Virgil lays out the world as it functions, gives us a glimpse of how it might have functioned differently, and leaves his demonstration without gnomic epigram, but rather susceptible to interpretation and frequently to competing interpretations. The reader time and again is left to supply the epigram, and there are frequently more than one from which to choose. In this respect the text of Virgil is intensely ambiguous. And in such a text, point of view or focalization will therefore be worthy of attention.

This book, then, is chiefly about reception, about the attempts, from the time of its publication, to put Virgilian poetry back into a constructed Augustan box which its details and nuances so constantly threaten to break open. In the process, however, it is occupied with constructing or reviving meanings that two millennia of literature and scholarship have largely tried to suppress. The reception of accumulated generations, when it is strong and relatively unified, may establish itself as literary fact, and may become difficult to dislodge, so engrained does it become in the handbooks, commentaries and literary histories, and even in the *apparatus criticus*. That is true of the poetry of Virgil to an extraordinary degree, partly because of its perceived intersection and identity with the outlook of Augustus. That outlook in turn becomes important for European cultural élitism, which constructs an Augustus to whom Virgil is just an appendage. Until recently, the reception of Virgil outside the field of Classics was predominantly Augustanized, in part because vernacular poets and other writers were products of educational systems which never questioned the truth of the Augustan Virgil.[19] And some, such as Dryden, had their own neo-Augustan purposes in mind. In such a situation defamiliarization of the received construction will not easily occur, but I would invite the reader to construct a naiveté about Augustus and "his" poet, at least for the time being.

[19] There are notable exceptions, for instance, eighteenth-century England, as Weinbrot (1978) has shown.

Unless otherwise indicated I have provided the translations of ancient and modern works, functional rather than literary or elegant (*excudent alii* . . .). Finally, in the words of another Virgilian, "I have tried to give honour where honour is due, although the extent of international literature on Virgil is so great that I cannot be sure that I have succeeded."[20] If this was true in the infancy of the twentieth century, a glance at the bulk of Marouzeau's *L'Année Philologique* available in recent years, not to mention a glance at the several pages of Virgilian listings appearing each year, reveals how difficult is the issue of full acknowledgement; like Heinze I regret inevitable failings. To the degree I succeed I am in debt to the librarians past and present of Harvard's Widener Library, the place where I have had the privilege and delight to spend so much of my life, with various manifestations of Virgil, in recent years.

[20] Heinze (1903, tr. 1993) vii.

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