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Virgil and tragedy

Since antiquity Virgil the epicist has also been viewed as Virgil the tragedian; Martial describes him simply as *Maro cothurnatus*, 'Virgil in buskins' (5.5.8, 7.63.5). The task of collecting the numerous parallels between the *Aeneid* and tragedies both Attic and Roman was well under way by the time of the late-antique commentators Servius and Macrobius. But why should the poet who set out to write the definitive Roman epic include so many elements from the distinct (if historically related) genre of tragedy?

A recent study shows the inseparability of formal study of tragic sources for the *Aeneid* from wider questions of interpretation. Oliver Lyne exploits an allusion to the Sophoclean Ajax in the characterisation of Aeneas to reinforce a prevalent modern reading of the *Aeneid* as a 'tragic' (with a small 't') poem: 'a further [non-epic] voice naggingly insinuates a quite different message',[1] a message that makes of the poem a pessimistic, even subversive and anti-Augustan epic. Here the opposition of 'epic' and 'tragic' implies a conflict between the *Aeneid*'s function as a public panegyric of Roman history and the valuation to be given to the private experience of loss and grief. Implicit also is a reading of Attic tragedy that emphasizes the psychological experience and moral dilemmas of its characters. But this individualistic approach to tragedy is itself but one of a range of possible responses to that genre. An examination of the tragic elements in the *Aeneid* within conceptual frameworks developed over the last few decades for the analysis of Attic tragedy leads to two general conclusions: first, that the *Aeneid* is 'tragic' at deeper levels of structure than has perhaps yet been realised; and secondly, that the evaluative use of the term 'tragic' (or 'pessimistic', 'anti-Augustan') leads to an over-simplified opposition of two points of view holding out the possibility of a final arbitration. By contrast recent studies of Attic tragedy have argued that the agonistic forms of the genre yield not simple and final judgements, but a dialectic of proliferating

[1] Lyne (1987) 12.

complexity. My claim, in short, is that the *Aeneid* is a problematic text, in the sense that has been given to the term 'problematic' since Vernant in his classic 1969 paper on 'Tensions and ambiguities in Greek tragedy'[2] asserted that 'tragedy turns reality into a problem'.

First, a sketch of attempts earlier in this century to define the tragic in the *Aeneid*. Richard Heinze used Aristotelian terms in placing the tragic qualities of the *Aeneid* at the centre of critical attention: for Heinze Dido, in the 'tragic epyllion'[3] of *Aeneid* 4, is a tragic protagonist who undergoes a sudden *peripeteia* ('reversal'), as she falls from the summit of her dream of bliss to meet her unhappy death. Heinze makes the sudden *peripeteia* a central structural feature in Virgil's dramatisation of the more even tenor supposed natural to epic narrative; with this is associated the emotional goal of *ekplexis* ('amazement'), traced directly to Aristotle's definition of the function of tragedy as the arousal of the emotions of pity and fear.[4] The emotionality of the *Aeneid* is undeniable; Heinze looks only to the Greek tragic tradition, but it is important for the *Aeneid* that Roman adaptations of Greek tragic models accentuated even further the genre's striving after pathos.[5] Heinze inaugurates a line of critics who use the *Poetics* as a scaffolding for their reading of the *Aeneid* or of episodes within it.[6] Repeated attempts have been made to use Aristotle's slippery term *hamartia* to gain a foothold on the problem of attributing guilt or innocence to the major figures of Dido and Turnus;[7] this is particularly important for the debate as to whether Turnus is an 'enemy of the state' or a tragic hero.

Anglo-Saxon criticism in the earlier part of this century, influenced by Hegelian concepts of the tragic as popularised by A. C. Bradley,[8] tended to a more abstract formulation of the conflicts in the *Aeneid*: thus E. E. Sikes: 'The Fourth Book is a tragedy, and the essence of tragedy is a conflict, not only of wills but of rights. Both Aeneas and Dido have their points of view, which demand our sympathy, though of course we are not required to sympathize equally.'[9] More recently R. B. Egan has discussed the problem of *pietas* in the *Aeneid*, referring to the episode of the mother of Euryalus in Book 9, but with implications for our reaction to

[2] Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1981) ch. 2. [3] Heinze (1993) 96.
[4] Heinze (1993) 251–8, 370–3.
[5] Argenio (1961) 198–212; Traina (1974) 113–65, 202. For the possible wider influence of the passionate heroines of Roman tragedy on Augustan poetry see Griffin (1985) 203, 208–10.
[6] Dido: Wlosok (1976). Turnus: von Albrecht (1970).
[7] E.g. Moles (1984); Schenk (1984). [8] Bradley (1909).
[9] Sikes (1923) 190; for another example of this kind of reading see Glover (1912) 175.

the last scene of the poem:[10] 'The simple tragic truth of the matter is that a heroic act of *pietas* in the *Aeneid* may also be an act of the greatest moral repugnance, that one and the same act embodies two antagonistic principles.' Egan thinks of the competing family duties in the *Oresteia* and the *Antigone*. The *Antigone* is the classic example of an Attic tragedy that is standardly read in this way; Simon Goldhill comments that 'Since Hegel's reading of the play, it has been difficult not to consider the text of the *Antigone* in terms of dialectic and opposition . . . It is difficult . . . to read the *Antigone* without making not only moral judgements but the sort of one-sided moral judgements that the play itself seems to want to mark as leading to tragedy.'[11] This observation on the way that critics fall into the trap of mirroring movements made *within* a tragic text is one that Virgilian critics might ponder.

Both Aristotelian and Hegelian versions of 'tragic' criticism of the *Aeneid* tend to place great weight on the experience of the individual actors in the epic: the former through an emphasis on Aristotle's discussions of the tragic protagonist, the tragic flaw, and the arousal of the tragic emotions; the latter through a sympathy with the experience of the individual subject crushed between the clashing rocks of incompatible abstractions. In a generalised usage the word 'tragic' is often used by Virgilians as virtually synonymous with 'private', in the standard opposition of 'private' and 'public' voices, where for 'public' may be read 'epic'. The recent privileging of the 'private' over the 'public' is a symptom of liberal humanism's interest in the individual subject and his or her responsibility for exercising personal choice in the face of vast supra-personal forces or institutions. The consequence for readings of the *Aeneid* is to locate true value in the interior experiences of an Aeneas, a Dido, a Turnus, of suffering parents and children, exposed to the impersonal and inhuman structures of militarism and absolutism.

The paradigm shift in much recent criticism of Attic tragedy has been away from a focus on individual psychology and morality to a concern with political, social, and cultural relationships. The tragic self is understood not so much as the heroic individual struggling for self-determination, but as the *locus* of contesting roles within the structures of gender, household, and city. The search for solutions to the moral dilemmas thrown up by tragic plots has given way to an analysis of the tensions and problematics that emerge when the structures of the *polis* are tested to breaking-point.[12] Tragedy's fascination with liminality and transgression is given historical context as a discursive engagement with the tensions of the rapidly developing society of fifth-century Athens, as the democracy struggles to come to terms with the shifting relationship between the collective and the individual, between mass and elite, and with changing roles in household and city.

[10] Egan (1980). [11] Goldhill (1986) 88–9. [12] A good survey in Segal (1986).

How might we use this kind of criticism in reassessing the presence of the 'tragic' in Virgil's epic? To see how the narrow focus on the moral and psychological may be widened, with the help of a tragic model, to include the historical and political, we can turn to the end of the *Aeneid*.[13] Aeneas' killing of Turnus is one of the most 'personal' moments in the epic, and readers are under pressure to pass judgement according to their sense of the individual moral worth and humanity of Aeneas and his victim. But although the hero's vengeful violence appears to result from an intensely private passion, the omniscient narrator has inserted it within a more extensive closural structure that determines both human and divine action. In the final scene Aeneas first throws a spear that exceeds even the force of the thunderbolt (12.921–3); at the end the *coup de grâce* is delivered by a man 'ablaze with fury (*furiis*) and terrible in his anger' (946–7). Allusion to Jupiter's weapon, the thunderbolt, is associated with the eruption of a hellish fury (texts of Virgil's day did not distinguish between *furiis* 'fury' and *Furiis* 'the Furies'); this combination unfolds along the temporal axis the contradiction of a single moment a hundred lines before when, in the last divine action of the poem, Jupiter sends down to earth a Fury (here referred to as a *Dira*, the embodiment of god's wrath, *dei ira*). The Fury rushes down with the stormy force later attributed to Aeneas' spear: with 12.855 'she flies and is carried to earth on a swift whirlwind', compare 923 '[the spear] flies like a black whirlwind'. Juturna, Turnus' sister, recognises that this apparition seals her brother's fate. Aeneas' apparently private impulse to kill Turnus is in fact pre-scripted on the divine level. The unsettling use by the supreme Olympian of an agent normally associated with the Underworld, with its re-enactment in the Fury-like vengeance of Jupiter's vicar Aeneas, has a tragic model in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, whose plot is finally resolved by an alliance between the Olympian gods and the Erinyes when the latter are naturalised as honorary citizens of Athens in their cave below the Acropolis. The specifically Roman implication of the finale to the legendary story of Aeneas and Turnus is suggested by the awesome description of the Capitol, the hill of Jupiter at the centre of what will be Rome, at 8.349–50 'already in those days the dread (*dira*)

[13] For further details see Hardie (1991); see also the discussions by Tarrant and Braund above.

religious awe of the place terrified the fearful countryfolk'. Jupiter's capacity for furious violence has been previously revealed to us when we saw 'the father himself' among the 'dread (*dirae*) shapes' of the Olympian gods busy with the destruction of Troy at 2.617–23. An etymological pun in the Jupiter and Dira scene in Book 12 imports another Roman overtone (849–50): the Dirae 'appear' (*apparent*) at the throne of Jupiter, like the *apparitores*, the attendants of Roman magistrates. As agent of official violence the Dira may be compared to the lictors, with their rods and axes (and at this point we may well remember the 'cruel axes' of that other father, the first consul Brutus, who put love of country and freedom before mercy to his son, 6.817–23). This all adds up to a socio-political issue that concerns the structures of state-control, rather than (simply) a problem of the behaviour of the individual hero. Virgil raises the question of the relationship between legitimate power, let us call it the *pax Augusta*, and arbitrary violence. Put like that, this is hardly a new reading; the point to stress is that this problematisation of the end of the poem reflects the structures of Attic tragedy. One may also compare the interminable debate over the meaning of the death of Turnus with the discussion by recent Aeschylean critics of the way in which the apparently decisive conclusion of the *Oresteia* works against its own status as a *telos* (how can the Erinyes *both* be socialised as the 'Kindly Ones' *and* retain their deterrent efficacy as a principle of fear at the heart of the Athenian democracy?).[14] While in formal terms the ending of the *Aeneid* is very *un*tragic, because of its unforeseen abruptness, it is highly tragic both in the sense of personal tragedy, and also in the sense of the problematisation of social and political structures.

Vernant, in an essay entitled 'The historical moment of tragedy in Greece' (1968), develops the thesis that fifth-century Attic tragedy is the product of the particular conditions of fifth-century Athenian society, struggling to come to terms with the vast changes involved in the full realisation of the city-state, as older values collide with the new legal and political systems. While the changes in Roman society involved in the transition from the Republic to the principate were not on the scale of the changes experienced in the fifth-century BC city-state, nevertheless if there is a 'tragic moment' (to use Vernant's phrase) in the history of Rome, it is the years around the Battle of Actium (31 BC) when Octavian and the Roman people had to negotiate the institutional and ideological gap between the

[14] See also Vernant in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1981) 23 n. 3 on the ambivalent balance between Peitho and the Erinyes in the *Eumenides*. The Zeus of Aeschylus' *Supplices* [illegible] both an Olympian sky and the infernal shadows.

discredited structures of the Republic and the unproven and potentially repugnant alternative. This is in many ways a more critical moment in the history of Rome than what Biliński, arguing for an analogy between the conditions of fifth-century Athens and those prevailing in Rome at the time of the introduction and flourishing of tragedy in the latter city, refers to as the 'heroic age' of the third and second centuries BC.[15] The French school of Vernant and his associates has focused on the problem of the relationship between the collective of the city-state and the individual, above all the heroic and pre-eminent individual of pre-democratic social organisations. Homer already explores the problem of heroes who are expected to serve the interests of their group altruistically, but are encouraged at the same time (and indeed in the pursuit of the communal good) to strive for a competitive, individualistic superiority. In tragedy this instability *within* the Homeric system intensifies when it becomes the instability of two different systems, one old and one new, rubbing up against each other.

If tragedy examines the problems raised by the survival of an obsolescent heroic individualism, Augustan epic has to confront the inverse problem, the emergence of a new autocratic individualism out of the collectivity of the *res publica*. This is already clear from the example of the killing of Turnus: the manifestation of state-sanctioned terror and violence (Jupiter's Fury–lictor) in the unpredictable behaviour of the single hero Aeneas anticipates the problem, ever-present in the Empire, of containing and averting the anger of one man, the emperor; while the course of action notoriously rejected by Aeneas, the sparing of his enemy, images the flip-side of that coin in Julius Caesar's advertisement of the virtue of clemency (the autocrat's gracious forbearance from venting his anger). Another passage where a reading of the specifically Roman problems of the relationship between individual and collective yields a 'tragic' interpretation of the kind here proposed is the Marcellus episode at the end of *Aeneid* 6, the premature death of a young man at the end of the first half of the poem that corresponds to the premature death of Turnus at the end of the second half. The 'tragedy' of Marcellus is frequently read in terms of personal loss and grief, often with the further appeal to the familiar opposition of public and private voices, as if the death of Marcellus were somehow the cost of the glorious fulfilment of empire. But the death of the emperor's nephew also highlights a structural problem within the principate; the terms of the problem are set up when Anchises presents the last figure in the main parade of Roman heroes, Fabius Cunctator, 6.845–6 *tu Maximus ille es, | unus qui nobis cunctando restituis rem*, 'You are that Maximus, the one

[15] Biliński (1958) 11.

man who by delaying restores our state.' An individual hero, one man, the 'greatest man' (*maximus*), who single-handedly restores the collective, the *res* (*publica*), to itself. This is obviously a powerful precedent in a line of heroes that will culminate in the one *princeps*, Augustus, who claimed to have restored the *res publica*. Anchises in fact quotes almost verbatim a famous line from Ennius' second-century BC epic on Roman history.

The Marcellus coda reveals one of the dangers in a system where the community is dependent on the presence of the one great man. Anchises first points to an earlier great Marcellus, another version of the Republican 'one man', a pre-eminent individual (856 'in victory he towers over all men') who preserves the republic (857–8 *rem Romanam . . . sistet*, 'he will hold fast the Roman state'). The line of Marcellus was to have excelled even itself in the person of the younger Marcellus, snatched prematurely from Rome by the jealous gods; his unrealised potential to be the greatest of all Romans is expressed through a comparison with all others of the Trojan–Romulean race (857–9). The funeral enacted verbally at the end of Book 6 replaces the triumph that would surely have followed from his irresistible military might (879–81), the triumph whose absence is the more strongly felt through the structural homology between this last scene in the Parade of Heroes and the last scene on the Shield of Aeneas at the end of Book 8, the triple triumph of Augustus. The general reference in 870 to 'the Roman stock' lightly veils the real point at issue, that Marcellus was being groomed for the succession; the continuity not so much of the 'Roman race', but of the Julian *gens* (789–90 *omnis Iuli / progenies*) was threatened by his death, starkly revealing the fragility of a system in which the security of the state depends on the physical survival of one man and his heir. The succession was indeed to prove one of the most intractable problems of the principate. Augustus himself delivered the funeral speech at the public funeral of Marcellus before burying his nephew in his own Mausoleum, that colossal architectural statement of the presence in the city of Rome of the one man and his family.

The endings of Books 6 and 12 are equally problematic in their own ways, but grief, private and public, at the death of a potential successor is easier to talk about openly than is the dark necessity of the anger of the autocrat. In dealing with the first Virgil speaks directly of contemporary events, but in approaching the latter he works through the events of a remote legendary past. At the beginning of *Georgics* 3 the poet offers us the fantasy of his own sideshow to Octavian's triple triumph of 29 BC. The imaginary temple to Caesar Octavian contains the sculptural equivalent of a historical epic on the achievements of the contemporary hero (26–33); in the lines that immediately precede (24–5) we hear of theatrical performances.

Virgil offers us no hint of what as poetic *triumphator* he will produce on this stage, but we might think of the famous stage-work that was actually produced at games in Rome in 29 BC to celebrate the victory at Actium, the tragedy *Thyestes* by Virgil's close friend Lucius Varius Rufus, a work that may have used events from the Greek legendary past to comment on the stirring events of the immediate past. The contrast between Varius' legendary tragedy and the historical 'epic' embodied in the poetic temple draws our attention to Virgil's strategic decision to write a *legendary* rather than a *historical* epic. There is a metonymical relation of cause and effect between the story of Aeneas and the history of Augustus, a relation that serves the panegyrical and epic function of 'praising Augustus through his ancestors' (as Servius describes the 'intention' of the poem). But more important is the metaphorical relation between the events of the legendary past and those of more recent history, and this is the relation between past and present in Attic tragedy. Virgil's decision to write an *Aeneid* rather than an *Augusteid* is the crucial point of liberation from the panegyrical straitjacket of historical epic into the freedom to problematise the issues of Roman history and of the principate.

Aeneid 8 offers in microcosm the whole structure of the past–present relationship in the poem, and provides a measure of the difference between legendary problematisation and contemporary panegyric. The Roman part of the book begins and ends with narratives of heroic victory and celebration, first the story of Hercules and Cacus with the ensuing hymn of the Salii, and secondly the scenes on the Shield of Aeneas of the Battle of Actium and the triple triumph. It is not easy to deconstruct the panegyrical content of the Shield: the scene of Actium presents an easy contrast between, on the one side, the orderly formation of Augustus attended by Italians and Romans, citizens and gods, and backed up by his admiral Agrippa, and on the other side the disorderly and heterogeneous barbarian rabble of the forces of Antony, accompanied not by an Agrippa, but by the unspeakable 'Egyptian wife', whose presence confuses categories of gender (a woman in the front line) and of nationality (an Egyptian allied with a Roman). The turning-point of the battle itself is narrated through the defeat of the monstrous and hybrid Egyptian gods by the Graeco-Roman Olympians. The distant type of the victory at Actium is the victory of Hercules over Cacus on the site of Rome, but, as many have noted, Virgil goes out of his way to blur – to problematise – the simple dichotomy between Olympian hero and chthonic monster: the hero of reason falls prey to a fiery fury that seems the more proper quality of the fire-breathing monster Cacus. The hero of civilisation and future god falls below the level of humanity into a semi-bestial passion. Attic tragic treatments of Heracles

provide parallels for this destructuring of the categories of beast, man, and god, for example the first stasimon of Sophocles' *Trachiniae* describing the fight between Heracles and the river-god Achelous in such a way that the son of Zeus almost merges into the bull-form of his adversary. The qualitative difference in *Aeneid* Book 8 between the Actium scene and the Hercules and Cacus narrative reflects the 'tragic distancing' operative in the latter episode.

Hercules is the extreme example of the transgressive hero, the hero who confuses boundaries, and through whom the tragedians explore liminal situations; but liminality is a constant feature of all tragedy, as the French school with its anthropological and structuralist roots has made abundantly clear.[16] The *Aeneid* lends itself pre-eminently to an analysis in terms of liminality, and tragic models are never far away. The whole plot of the *Aeneid* is one of transition, of the geographical passage from the sacked Troy to new cities in Italy, during which Aeneas and his people must pass from their old identity to the possibility of a new identity as ancestors of the Roman race. Large-scale narratives of passage are ultimately of epic rather than tragic derivation, and there is much to be gained for an understanding of the *Aeneid* from recent structuralist-type analyses of the passage of Odysseus in the *Odyssey* from the masculine world of war at Troy to resocialisation in his Ithacan household. In Aeneas the Odyssean liminal roles of outcast and suppliant are yet more completely realised in a hero who is an exile rather than a homecomer. The *Aeneid* is also full of smaller narratives of passage and liminality that correspond at the level of the history of the individual to the epic's wider narrative of the passage of a nation over the centuries; the closest models for these individual histories are tragic, particularly in cases of a liminality that ends in catastrophe rather than in successful passage from one status to another.

One of the most obviously 'tragic' features of the *Aeneid* is the series of promising young people who die before their time (including Marcellus). The strong emotional impact of these stories cannot be downplayed, but beyond the *pathos* lie the abstract structures familiar above all from the Greek institution of the *ephebeia*, the practices and roles associated with the passage from childhood to adulthood, whose patterns, classically analysed in Vidal-Naquet's essay on 'The Black Hunter',[17] are now seen to pervade such tragedies as Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, and Euripides' *Bacchae*. *Aeneid* Book 9 is full of ephebic characters, most of whom fail to make it to adulthood; the one exception is Ascanius, whose killing of Numanus is applauded by Apollo as the act by which the boy

[16] See Segal (1986) 38–41. [17] Vidal-Naquet (1981).

realises *uirtus* (manliness/courage). Ascanius thus fulfils the epic model of the successful ephebe as represented by Odysseus' son Telemachus. The immediate foil to this success story is the tale of Nisus and Euryalus in which may be recognised many ephebic motifs. The two youths are 'black hunters', operating at night, not killing in open fight but trickily slaughtering the enemy as they sleep. Once discovered they take refuge in what has become their natural environment during their 'continual hunting' (9.245) since they arrived in Italy, the dark woods, in which the hunters now become the hunted. When Euryalus is captured Nisus continues to operate from cover, his spearthrows as unseen as any non-hoplite arrow, until the death of his beloved Euryalus forces him into the open to fight fair with his flashing sword; but this final burst of light, far from leading to the dawn of adulthood, seals his return to the darkness, this time of death. The cut-flower simile of Euryalus' death (435–7), with its allusion to the Catullan inversion of the epithalamial motif in poem 11 (the flower 'touched' by the plough), weaves into the ephebic pattern the corresponding female passage from virginity to womanhood,[18] reminding us that the dominant image of marriage in the *Aeneid* is the tragic one of wedding-as-funeral, the *thalamus* as tomb.[19]

Similar patterns structure the story of that most liminal of Virgilian characters, the Amazon Camilla, who confuses the boundaries between hunting and war, the pastoral wilderness and the warfare of an urban civilisation, feminine and masculine roles,[20] as she tries to reverse her passage into the realm of Diana when as a baby she crossed over the raging river Amasenus bound to the spear of her father. Unlike Nisus and Euryalus, she succeeds for a time in entering the adult male world of war, enjoying one of the most spectacular *aristeiai* in the epic, before she makes the fatal mistake of confusing the battlefield with a hunting-ground; the pointed placing of the words *uenatrix* 'huntress' and *bellatrix* 'warrior-woman' (7.805, 11.780) highlights the source of her tragedy in this confusion of roles.

Camilla is in many respects a mirror-image of Dido, and an investigation of liminality will usefully supplement the established tragic readings of the Dido episode, and also shift the emphasis somewhat away from the psychologistic towards the social and cultural aspects of Dido's 'tragedy'. Like Aeneas, Dido has a history of exile; when we first meet her she appears successfully to have made the transition from one role (dependent wife) to another (supreme monarch). But the intersection of her story with

[18] See Fowler (1987). [19] Seaford (1987).
[20] Catullus 63 would be an easy object for this kind of analysis in pre-Virgilian Latin poetry: see Griffin (1985) on tragic influence in Cat. 64 and 68.

that of the Trojan exile casts her back into a state of confusion – of liminality – that is resolved only by her death. The emblem of this confusion is the figure who in Book 1 first informs Aeneas (and the reader) about Dido, Venus. The goddess of love is disguised as a virgin, and Aeneas initially takes her for one of Diana's nymphs, or for the virgin goddess of hunting herself. There is an element of the metatheatrical about Venus' entrance: in preparation for the drama to unfold, she has put on costume, and, as E. L. Harrison has shown,[21] her account of the earlier history of Dido takes the shape of a Euripidean prologue, and she is appropriately shod in the buskin (*cothurnus*, 337). A combination of Venus and Diana in a tragic context evokes the goddesses whose power struggle mirrors on the divine level the impossible contradictions in which Euripides' Phaedra is involved; it is as if Virgil has rolled into one the opening and closing epiphanies in the *Hippolytus*, Aphrodite in the prologue and Artemis as *dea ex machina*. Dido herself combines features both of Hippolytus – she has vowed herself to perpetual chastity after her first husband's death – and of Phaedra – as a woman whose established status is disrupted by an illicit passion that gets the better of her sense of shame and modesty (*pudor*, *aidos*). As in the *Hippolytus* the human drama is played out through a polarity of civilisation and the wild: it is when Dido goes out into the wilderness in which Aeneas met Venus that she succumbs to her passion, as Venus once again demonstrates her power in what should be the domain of Diana (perhaps partly because Dido fulfils Phaedra's fantasy of racing over the mountains in the hunt). On her return Dido figuratively brings back wild nature into the city when she rages through Carthage like a Bacchant on Mount Cithaeron (300–3); later in her dreams she once more experiences the sensation of an exile far from civilisation, lines followed immediately by the famous simile at 469–73 comparing Dido to Pentheus and Orestes on the tragic stage, a jarring pointer to the theatricality of the story. In her desperate musings on the night before Aeneas' departure she fantasises about a complete escape from a civilisation in which social roles and sexuality are irreconcilably opposed, 550–1. Dido is the victim of transgressions of a kind thoroughly at home in Attic tragedy.

Reflection on recent criticism of Attic tragedy reveals the pervasiveness of tragic patterns in the *Aeneid*. This may be another answer to Brooks Otis' question of how Virgil managed to reinvigorate the flagging tradition of Graeco-Roman epic and thus produce *the* Roman classic text;[22] furthermore the 'tragic' quality of the *Aeneid* was an important condition for the

[21] Harrison (1972–3). [22] Otis (1964) ch. 2 'The obsolescence of epic'.

successful production of further imperial epics: an 'epic of problematics' might be a fair label for the continuing line of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Lucan's *Bellum ciuile*, and Statius' *Thebaid* (the influence of specific tragic models is particularly important in the epics of Ovid and Statius). There remains the literary-historical question of the degree of Virgil's originality in writing a 'tragic epic'. Heinze[23] saw close parallels to *his* list of dramatic features in the *Aeneid* (concentration of dramatic interest, striking reversals, careful psychological motivation) in what we know of the so-called peripatetic school of historiography; Heinze speculates on the possible presence of such features in the lost Hellenistic epic, but thinks it unlikely that the Roman epic poet Ennius was a predecessor of Virgil in this respect. One might on the other hand press Servius' comment on *Aeneid* 2.486ff. that 'this passage has been taken from the fall of Alba', probably referring to the account of the sack of Alba Longa in Book 2 of Ennius' *Annals*, and ask whether Ennius' narrative was already characterised by the tragic qualities found in Virgil's narrative of the destruction of Priam's palace. Ennius, in fact, was a tragedian as well as an epicist (a combination also seen in Livius Andronicus, Naevius, Varius Rufus, and Ovid – a Roman tradition, perhaps).

The surviving Hellenistic epic of Apollonius is a more certain precedent; the use of tragic models particularly in Book 3 of the *Argonautica* is well known, and Virgil will have received an impulse to his dramatic presentation of Dido from the Apollonian Medea. Richard Hunter has shown the presence in the characterisation of Jason of the ephebic patterns of Attic tragedy and other earlier Greek literature,[24] and Apollonius may here too be a mediator between tragedy and the *Aeneid*.

There is also the question of Roman tragedy itself. The fragmentary evidence at least allows us to see that Virgil drew extensively on the Roman tragedians, and it is often difficult in particular instances to judge whether a Roman tragedy or its Greek original is the primary model.[25] The storm that opens the *Aeneid* corresponds to the storm in *Odyssey* Book 5, but is heavily indebted in detail to *nostos*-storms in Roman tragedy (Pacuvius' *Teucer* and Accius' *Clytaemestra*); Wigodsky suggests as the reason 'the rarity of other storm scenes in early Latin literature' (85).[26] Alternatively it may be that through this opening salvo of tragic imitations Virgil stakes his claim to be the continuator of the Roman tragic tradition. Note also how Virgil (through Juno) remotivates the *second* half of the epic through heavy tragic allusion: Allecto is closely related to the personification

[23] Heinze (1993) 371–3. [24] Hunter (1988).
[25] Wigodsky (1972) 90ff.; Stabryla (1970); Zorzetti (1990). [26] Wigodsky (1972) 85.

of frenzy, *Lyssa*, in Euripides' *Heracles*, and Virgil's descriptions of the effects of the Fury may draw on Latin tragedies on Dionysiac themes (the centrality of Furies in the plot and of Maenads in the imagery of the *Aeneid* is itself a mark of the poem's tragic quality; neither are at all prominent in Homeric epic). In both Books 1 and 7 Juno, like an attentive theatre-goer, mentally rehearses old plays as examples to imitate in her own behaviour. At 1.39–45 she remembers the death of Oilean Ajax in the version of Accius,[27] while at 7.319–22 she tries to use Ennius' *Alexander* as the script for the future history of the Trojans in Italy. In *Aeneid* Book 1 there is something of an overdetermination of tragic introductions, first through Juno and then through Venus' Euripidean 'prologue' to the history of Dido. It may be no accident that in the great Hellenistic city which Aeneas sees rising in the wastes of Africa theatres seem to be the most eye-catching feature (1.427–9).

Although Accius (d. after 86 BC) had been the last major Roman writer of new tragedies, there had been regular productions of tragedies through the first century BC. Late Republican writers of tragedies, whether for stage performance or recitation, include C. Asinius Pollio, a close literary associate of Virgil and probably the author of the tragedies 'worthy of Sophocles' praised at the beginning of Eclogue 8,[28] as well as Varius, author of the *Thyestes* performed in 29 BC. The slender evidence surviving suggests that in their plays Pollio and Varius may have aspired to create a new, 'classic', stage in the development of Roman tragedy, challenging directly the great tragedians of fifth-century Athens;[29] Virgil perhaps subscribed to this ideal in his own epic rewritings of tragedy. But in the event the number of tragic productions in Augustan Rome rapidly dwindles, for whatever reasons.[30]

Virgil's use of tragedy needs also to be assessed against the background of the cultural and ideological functions of Roman Republican tragedy. A line of Italian scholars has sought to find in their reconstructions of third- and second-century BC tragedies direct reflections of the contemporary class struggle;[31] but criticism of this political criticism has not been lacking.[32] Eckhard Lefèvre argues that a major difference between Attic tragedy and the Roman adaptations lay in the panegyrical character of the latter, the result of the overpowering pressure of the ideology of a Roman historical destiny that drains the truly tragic from Roman tragedies.[33] Another way of putting it would be to say that Roman tragedy tends to the epic, understood as the genre of praise poetry. If so, Virgil's adaptations of tragic models represent a movement in the opposite direction, producing a 'tragic epic', where 'tragic' is to be understood in terms of the categories both of Aristotle and of Vernant and his school. The closest approximation to an Accian stage tyrant in the *Aeneid* is Mezentius, but the reader's response to the Etruscan king is problematised by the paradoxical combination in his person of tyrannical bestiality with heroic virtue and parental piety.[34] But whatever our assessment of the nature of Republican tragedy, it may be dangerous to underestimate the part played by Virgil himself in forging an amalgam of the commemorative, panegyrical tradition of historical epic with the problematics of Attic legendary tragedy.

[27] Degl' Innocenti Pierini (1980) 41 n. 50 suggests that Accius' picture of the blasted Ajax may be indebted to a Hellenistic gigantomachy; this would yield a ring-composition with Aeneas' final Gigantomachic blasting of Turnus.

[28] See Nisbet and Hubbard on Horace, *Odes* 2.1.9–12.

[29] Tarrant (1978) 258–61.

[30] Bibliography at Biliński (1958) 51 n. 99.

[31] Pastorino (1957); Biliński (1958); Lana (1958–9); Argenio (1961).

[32] For a balanced overview of the issues see La Penna (1979). The ancient sources make it plain that in the later Republic and under the Empire the theatre was a place for direct political expression on the part of the *plebs*: Abbott (1907); Tengström (1977); Nicolet (1976) 483–94.

[33] Lefèvre (1976) 43.

[34] La Penna (1980).

FURTHER READING

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Virgil and Greek tragedy

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FIONA COX

Envoi: the death of Virgil

In 1930 Europe celebrated the bimillennium of Virgil's birth. The celebra tions fell in the middle of Mussolini's dictatorship (1922–43), strengthenin the links that Mussolini sought to establish between his Italian regime an ancient Rome. The *Aeneid*, singing of the birth of a new city and a nev empire, helped to validate Mussolini's imperialist policies, and in 1936 a new Italian empire was born. In the same year the Austrian writer Herman Broch began to meditate upon Virgil's position in the modern world an by 1937 he had conceived his novel *The Death of Virgil*.[1] This envoi wil focus in particular on Broch's novel, since it probes and anticipates many of the anxieties attached to twentieth-century responses to Virgil.

The opposed political approaches to Virgil offered by Mussolini and the anti-Fascist Broch typify the variety of Virgilian studies proliferating at this time. A renaissance of interest in Virgil was due not solely to the bimillennium, but more suggestively to the sense of crisis pervading Europe in the *entre-deux-guerres* period. George Steiner has observed that after the First World War the European ear became more attuned to the Virgilian voice of exile than to the Homeric cry of triumph.[2] Such a claim seems validated by the wealth of Virgilian biographies published in the 1920s and 1930s. Amongst the most significant was André Bellessort's *Virgile, son œuvre et son temps* (1920), a celebration of a 'Fascist' Virgil whom Bellessort wished to portray at the head of a new cultural tradition rooted in France. This partisan approach was maintained by Bellessort's pupil Robert Brasillach, who was eventually executed for Nazi collaboration and whose book *Présence de Virgile* (1931) strives to portray a modern-day Fascist Virgil: *On a voulu que le lecteur pût commencer ce livre comme s'il s'agissait de l'histoire d'un jeune Italien de 1930*.[3] But the most influential

[1] I refer throughout to Jean Starr Untermeyer's translation of *The Death of Virgil* in the OUP Twentieth-Century Classics collection.
[2] Steiner (1990) 10. See also Ziolkowski (1993) 6.
[3] Brasillach (1931) 250.