

## 7 Contesting Ideologies: Ritual and Empire

THE RITUAL AND TRAGIC INTERTEXTS OF THE *AENEID* NEED TO be considered side by side with the Homeric intertext and its role not only in the literary valuation or understanding of the epic but also as a vehicle for the expression and promotion of Augustan ideology. My analysis has privileged the tragic/ritual intertext and its contingent implications, which emphasize ideological anxieties vis-à-vis the ability of the new Augustan order to achieve lasting peace. It is important to stress, however, that my readings must also be appraised within the poem's overall ideological framework, as this emerges from the poem's other intertexts as well as from the poem's reception.

The simultaneous existence of different and opposing ideologies within a text that has become synonymous with Augustan ideology is not surprising considering the most recent advances in the field of political theory, which have brought to bear the complex nature of ideology and the intense processes of negotiation, suppression, and manipulation that take place therein.<sup>1</sup> Gramsci was the first to view ideology not as monolithic and static but as a dialogic and dynamic phenomenon, in which opposing voices define its content even if they are ultimately suppressed (Bell 1992: 190). For Gramsci, ideology is not directed to the subordinated classes but aims at the self-understanding of the dominant class. Bourdieu, by contrast, focuses on the subordinated groups, which he views as complicit. For Bourdieu, these groups neither submit passively nor adopt freely the

<sup>1</sup> An introduction to theories of ideology can be found in Eagleton 1991. Bell (1992: 187–96) gives a good and concise summary of the main schools of thought on ideology.

tenets of the dominant class. Their consent is an act of misrecognition by which the dominated accept the values of the dominant class and apply its criteria to their own practices, even when these values and criteria go against their own interests (Bourdieu 1977: 114–15; Bell 1992: 190). Other theorists, such as Merquior, further qualify Bourdieu's notion of complicity by pointing out that consent is not an uncritical internalization of the values of the dominant class or belief in their legitimacy (Merquior 1979: 35). The same self-awareness may be claimed for the people of the dominant class: one may very well hold ideological views and be perfectly aware that they are ideological (Eagleton 1991: 60). Acquiescence is thus not passive but rather a product of negotiation.

This theoretical approach posits that ideology is the result of a tension between opposing and conflicting ideological stances and emphasizes that ideologies exist in specific historical moments and in relation to other ideologies (Bell 1992: 191). Viewed in this light, the unequal distribution of power that ideology necessarily promotes also implies a greater distribution of power than would exist in relationships defined by brute force. Ideology seeks legitimization and complicity, and in doing so it is a much more flexible and fluid mechanism than previously thought (Bell 1992: 193). Within this framework, the subject is seen as an actor, an agent who both generates and consumes the ideological message. As Catherine Bell puts it, "the actor emerges as divided, decentered, overdetermined, but quite active" (1992: 192).

Ritual practice constitutes a locus where such ideological negotiations are enacted and where ideologies are shaped. Ritual acts embody specific power relations, producing and objectifying hierarchies, structures, and beliefs (Bell 1992: 196). As is the case in ideological discourses, in rituals too objectification results in a misrecognition of their source and the arbitrariness of their claims. In other words, rituals are believed to originate and derive from powers and realities beyond the community, such as god or tradition, connected with the organization of nature and the cosmos. The participants therefore misrecognize the set of relationships and hierarchies they experience embodied in ritual acts and practices as originating from a body outside that of the community, thereby embracing them and accepting them as binding, unchanging, and eternal.

The Romans were no strangers to such objectification, boasting their origins from the gods: both Rome's founding fathers, Aeneas and

Romulus, had divine parentage, and both were deified after their death. Livy's preface lends voice to the interconnection between objectification, misrecognition, and ideology:

This allowance is made to the ancients to render more venerable the origins of cities by mixing human things with divine; and if any people are to be permitted to sanctify their origins and refer to the gods as their founders, such is the military glory of the Roman people that, when they say that their father and the father of their founder is no other than Mars, the nations of the earth submit to it just as they submit to their imperial power.<sup>2</sup>

The passage simultaneously endorses Rome's divine parentage and exposes it as an act of misrecognition of the source of its imperial power.<sup>3</sup> In this statement, we can see both the ideological import of Rome's divine origins and an awareness of its function as such. The intersection of imperial success and misrecognition is evident in Livy's passage, where Romans' claims to divine authority acquire validity because of their military might. The Romans themselves participated in this act of objectification, since they believed that their military and imperial success was a direct result of their religiosity.<sup>4</sup>

Livy's passage also brings to the foreground, the notion of consent, a key element in the dissemination of ideology. Participants in rituals accept the power structures enacted and promoted therein (Bell 1992: 207). At the same time, each participant brings to ritual activities "a self-constituting history that is a patchwork of compliance, resistance, misunderstanding, and redemptive personal appropriation of the hegemonic order" (Bell 1992: 208). A Roman, for instance, participating in a ritualized activity, such as the dedication of a temple or a public rite,

<sup>2</sup> Livy, *praef.* 7: *Datur haec uenia antiquitati ut miscendo humana diuinis primordia urbium augustiora faciat; et si cui populo licere oportet consecrare origines suas et ad deos referre auctores, ea belli gloria est populo Romano ut cum suum conditorisque sui parentem Martem potissimum ferat, tam et hoc gentes humanae patiantur aequo animo quam imperium patiuntur.*

<sup>3</sup> Compare Ovid, *Ars* 1.637: *expedit esse deos, et, ut expedit, esse putemus* [it is expedient that gods exist, and, since it is expedient, let us believe that gods exist]. Although Ovid makes this statement as advice for successfully gaining the affections of a lady, he goes even further than Livy in exposing religion's utilitarianism.

<sup>4</sup> Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.3.8; *De haruspicio responsis* 19; see also Orlin 2007: 76.

may assert that he or she accepts the official authority sponsoring these activities, yet he or she may still be hostile to that authority.

Augustus was keenly aware of the importance of cult and ritual as a means of consolidating his power by generating popular consent. During his reign, both in Rome and in the provinces, opportunities to participate in public life through the practice of religion and cult became available for the first time to people belonging to lower social strata. One such opportunity was presented through the reorganization of the administrative division of Rome into 14 *regiones* and 265 *vici* (wards); each *vicus* and its leaders (*vicomagistri*) were in charge of the cult of Lares at the crossroads, which included festivals and games and afforded participation to women and slaves. Previously, the cult's management had belonged to the *collegia*, associations consisting of members of the lower social classes, and was often the source of threats against the established order.<sup>5</sup> As a result, Augustus was able to transform a locus of turmoil into an instrument offering visible contribution to the new order<sup>6</sup> and thus generating consent to his regime.

Yet one's active participation in the ideological program of a certain order may not necessarily imply a wholesale acceptance of that order. That was certainly true in Augustan Rome, as the civil unrest of 6 CE makes plain (Dio Cassius 55.27.1; Galinsky 1996: 308). One of the ways in which Augustus used religion and ritual as a means to facilitate the process of reconciliation was the revitalization of the Arval Brotherhood. The group's cultic responsibilities were both public and private: its main task appears to have been the performance of public sacrifices to ensure agricultural fertility. By becoming a member of this group, Augustus joined the ranks of Rome's most illustrious families, many of whom had fought against him during the civil wars, and thus reached out to his former opponents. Membership in the group also afforded the possibility

<sup>5</sup> The *collegia* had been outlawed and reinstated several times during the Republic, until Augustus permanently banned them in 22 BCE. For further details on the vicissitudes of the fate of the *collegia* and their connection to riots, see Galinsky 1996: 300. See also Zanker 1988: 118–35.

<sup>6</sup> Galinsky 1996: 300–312. Augustus was able to do the same thing beyond the city of Rome by establishing the *collegia* of the *augustales* in Italy and the western part of the empire, associations devoted to the cult of the *princeps* (see Galinsky 1996: 310–12).

of "negotiated consent" (Bell 1992: 210–11), as can readily be seen in the case of Messalla Corvinus. A former supporter of Antony who had fought with Augustus in Actium, he resigned in protest from his office as prefect of Rome in 26 BCE but remained Augustus' Arval Brother (Galinsky 1996: 292). His dissent was thus qualified by his allegiance to Augustus through their shared religious affiliation.

Augustus' religious reform and moral legislation cast him as the revitalizer and champion of tradition precisely because ritual acts derive their power and effectiveness from their relevance to the beliefs, needs, and experiences of the civic body. The massive building program he launched is a case in point. It chiefly involved the restoration of temples, most of which had lapsed into a state of decay and disrepair during the time of civil wars. Although restoration plans were already at work in late Republican times, Augustus was justified in claiming that he truly transformed the religious landscape of Rome (Suetonius, *Aug.* 28.3). A professed adherence to tradition became the perfect vehicle for his new ideological message. For instance, new anniversary dates were given to many of the restored temples, rescheduled in such a way as to coincide with the *princeps'* birthday or other events significant for him or his policies (Galinsky 1996: 301). Accordingly, the gamut of ritual acts performed within the vicinity of these temples – festivals, ceremonies, and games – were rendered powerful because they purported both to restore a tradition considered lost and to emphasize the privileged position the Augustan regime claimed within that tradition.

This dual role of ritual as both constituting of and constituted by ideology complicates the idea of consent as synonymous with acquiescence. In this light, consent is negotiated (Bell 1992: 210–18) and reflective of the fragility of the objectification, authority, and traditionalism associated with ritual power. In other words, ritual requires only that its participants consent to forms, while it simultaneously allows the possibility of resistance to the authority it seeks to solidify. As Bell puts it, "negotiated compliance offers manifold opportunities for strategic appropriation, depending on one's mastery of social schemes, even to the point of subversion" (1992: 215). Such resistance in turn permits varying nuances in the ideological message that the dominant ritual activities project onto the social body.

As we have seen, Augustus himself was deeply aware of the power of ritual to promote his policies and cement his status as *princeps*, and

ritualized celebration early on formed a big component of his policy. A similar connection can also be seen at work in the *Aeneid*, composed in the early years of Augustus' rise (29–19 BCE): in Chapter 5, for instance, we saw that Ascanius and the Trojan youths perform a *lusus Troiae*, a public spectacle revived in the time of Augustus, linking Aeneas' present with the future of Rome. Other such examples abound in the epic: the description of Latinus' palace in Book 7, described as *augustum* (7.170), points to a group of buildings that Augustus will build (see Zetzel 1997: 195–96); in Book 8, Augustus' triple triumph after Actium in 29 BCE commemorates one of the most spectacular events in Rome that marked the end of civil wars.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, Augustus himself appropriated symbols from the *Aeneid* to proliferate his ideological program. In the Ara Pacis, a monument dedicated in 9 BCE, the identification of Augustus with Aeneas is made explicit by their similar representation: both figures have veiled heads; Augustus participates in a procession on the south side, while Aeneas can be viewed around the corner in a similar pose and performing a sacrifice (Hardie 1993: 21; Zanker: 1988: 201–10).

Within this framework, the mobilization of the ritual intertext in the *Aeneid* may therefore be explained as another means for the reproduction of the nascent social and political order of Augustus. Greek tragedy employs ritual to a similar effect: it dramatizes ideological battles (Seaford 1994: 363–67) while ultimately affirming and justifying Athenian hegemony over its allies (Tzanetou forthcoming). The *Aeneid's* use of the ritual/tragic intertext can thus be seen as one of a host of narrative strategies deployed to assert a specific type of power relations, the promotion of the principate and the justification of the power of Augustus as *princeps*. Similarly, as we have seen, the notion of repetition, so closely associated with both narrative and ritual, also permits the attainment of mastery and empowerment and thus promotes the ideological message of Augustus (Quint 1993: 50–53). Another such strategy, is, of course, the mobilization of the Homeric intertext.

The present study of the ritual and tragic intertexts, however, does not allow for such a unilateral interpretation of Vergil's poem, but paints a rather more complicated picture. My analysis demonstrates that the

<sup>7</sup> On Vergil's manipulation of historical events in this instance, see Miller 2000: 410–14.

ritual intertext of the *Aeneid* focuses on the fragility of ritual and the breakdown of ritual practices, exposing the artificiality of the power relations contained therein. As a result, the tragic/ritual intertext illustrates that the creation of ideology is a process whereby consent is negotiated and qualified. The reconciliation scene between Jupiter and Juno may serve as a case in point. By emphasizing the vulnerability of ritual and the precariousness of the idea of *concordia*, the episode showcases Juno's "negotiated consent" to Jupiter's plan. Juno's terms as well as her eventual agreement reveal how it is possible to agree with an ideological program and simultaneously challenge its terms and legitimacy.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the ritual intertext's depiction of Turnus as a *devotus* complicates his representation as the enemy "other" who is justly conquered. In casting Turnus as a version of one of the great heroes of the Republic, P. Decius Mus, the ritual intertext contests his "Homeric" identities as a second Hector or a second Achilles and reveals them as constructs of an ideological process that aims to justify Augustan supremacy.<sup>9</sup> As a result, the ideological nature of the poem stands exposed, and the ritual/tragic intertext becomes a way of registering opposition, anxiety, and repression.

The simultaneous existence in the *Aeneid* of the ideological positions of acquiescence and opposition to the Augustan regime is not simply another way of expressing the all-too-familiar axiom of the "two voices" of the epic, or to assert the privileging of the voice of resistance and pessimism over that of endorsement and optimism. Using a similar view of ideology, Duncan Kennedy, in an insightful essay, suggests that the terms "pro-" and "anti-Augustan" commonly used to describe political and ideological attitudes during this historical period possess neither a stable nor a clearly defined meaning. Focusing on language and discourse, he argues that at historical moments when power is on the move or being challenged, any ideologically charged word may be aligned to a variety of meanings and reflect different types of power relations. Accordingly, each "meaning" competes with others for supremacy (Kennedy 1992: 35). For Kennedy, Vergil writes in a period during which the fragmented discourse of the Republic is reorganized and the *princeps* gradually takes the

<sup>8</sup> Other scholars have shared this view. For a complete bibliography, see my discussion in Chapter 3 of this volume.

<sup>9</sup> On Turnus as a *devotus*, see Chapter 2, pp. 56–71.

form of an institution that will provide society with stable meaning. We should therefore look upon Augustus not as a person, Kennedy argues, but as an idea (Kennedy 1992: 35). The same ideological work is achieved through ritualization, which depersonalizes authority by assigning power to an office or formal status, not to a person (Bell 1992: 211).

I argue that the *Aeneid*, a text about the birth of a new nation and a new order, enacts a similar reorganization of reality. The ritual/tragic intertext's emphasis on the fragility of the epic's purported ideological proposition, however, suggests the indeterminacy of the notion of "Augustanism." In other words, it draws attention to the fact that the very idea of what it means to be "pro-Augustan" is still in the process of being defined. Each intertext operative in the epic, then, may be seen as vying with the other for supremacy and meaning. I propose that the ritual/tragic intertext and the Homeric intertext participate with equal force in this "reorganization" of civic discourse and the struggle for social stability. In the end, Augustus wins not only the civil war but also the battle over discourse and ideology. But my reading indicates that such a victory is not to be found in the text of the *Aeneid*. The poem's reception as pro-Augustan is undeniable. At the same time, given the ideological contests enacted within the text, this reception is better explained as a *result* of the triumph of the ideological program of Augustus, not as one of its causes.

The previous proposition need not imply that one should ignore or devalue those moments in the *Aeneid* that openly endorse Augustus' ideas or programs; but one need be aware that many of these "pro-Augustan" moments may have become important to Augustus only as a consequence of the poem's canonical, pro-Augustan status. A useful example can be seen, again, in the reconciliation scene between Jupiter and Juno in *Aeneid* 12. As Orlin (2007) convincingly argues, Jupiter's proposition to Juno ascribes the provenance of Roman religion to a single divine source, Jupiter, presented in the guise of divine revelation, despite the fact that Romans consistently resisted depicting their religious system as delivered by the gods (74). Orlin goes on to argue that the view of Roman religion projected here is similar to that behind Augustus' program of temple restoration. Roman temples served not only as venues for ritual activity but also "as monuments in which Roman memories and Roman history resided" (83) and thus helped create a unified sense



of identity encompassing both Romans and Italians. Vergil's revolutionary rewriting of Roman religious history found expression in Augustus' religious program (92). This "collusion" between the text of the *Aeneid* and Augustan ideology is arguably not the origin but the result of a long process of redefinition of civic discourse and national identity.

The dialogue of the epic's literary intertexts is thus better understood as enacting a dialogue between competing ideological positions. The Homeric intertext enables the processes of misrecognition that Bourdieu considers so important for the creation of ideology, by reinforcing the positive, heroic values the epic promotes, such as the notion of "empire without end." At the same time, the poem's tragic intertext, with its emphasis on ritual corruption and loss, eloquently demonstrates that "empire without end," desirable though it may be, comes at a price that individuals and even communities may not or should not wish to pay.<sup>10</sup> In this way, consent to Augustus' ideological program is qualified, appropriated, negotiated, while the individual emerges as actively engaged in the creation of ideological meaning. The *Aeneid* thus appears as a divided text in search for stability, for institutions that are both humane and able to control the forces of irrationality and destruction that have shattered the Roman social and political fabric. Attention to the ideological negotiations operative in the poem elucidates our understanding of its most puzzling quandaries as well as of the complexities surrounding the formation and proliferation of Augustan ideology.

<sup>10</sup> Anchises' famous bequest to Aeneas (6.851–53) read against Aeneas' killing of Turnus may be adduced as evidence for such an argument, and critics have often done so. See, for instance, Putnam's eloquent argumentation (1965: 192–201).

# GREEK TRAGEDY IN VERGIL'S "AENEID"

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