considering the relative merits of different approaches and drawing together discrete arguments (for example on the complex relationship between *fama* and genre) would have been a useful, if challenging, addition.

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'RECOVERING' THE MEANING OF THE *AENEID*

STAHL (H.-P.) *Poetry Underpinning Power. Vergil's* Aeneid*: the Epic for Emperor Augustus. A Recovery Study*. Pp. xii + 488, ill. Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2016. Cased, £45. ISBN: 978-1-910589-04-5.
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Virgilian scholarship was monopolised in the second half of the twentieth century by a bitter debate over the degree of Virgil's alleged Augustanism. The polemics have dampened since the mid-1990s, with many now either favouring ambivalent readings that see the very tension between optimism and pessimism as a major characteristic of the poem (see R. Tarrant, *Virgil Aeneid XII* [2012] – curiously absent from the present book) or else openly distrusting the appropriateness of the question when expressed in terms of a strict 'pro' or 'anti' dichotomy which is always bound to hold Augustus as an unavoidable point of reference (D. Kennedy, '"Augustan" and "Anti-Augustan": Reflections on Terms of Reference', in A. Powell [ed.], *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus* [1992], pp. 26–58, again absent from the present book). To these reactions' insistence in going 'beyond' the debate, S. opposes a backward-looking approach, attempting to turn the clock back to a time before WWII and especially the Vietnam War, the two events that S. thinks are to blame for the emergence of 'the Gentle Vergil School' (p. 61), which reads the poem as expressing sympathy for history's victims and concern with the human condition. The book is a response to R. Thomas' *Vergil and the Augustan Reception* (2001), an attempt to wipe out, in the name of philological 'objectivity', the allegedly subjective readings that originated with V. Pöschl's desire 'to make amends for his Nazi past' (p. 455) and were later fuelled by the anti-imperialist trends of American scholars 'in opposition to America's war in Vietnam' (p. 234). It labels itself as a 'recovery study' that looks for Virgil's 'verifiable intention' (p. 2) as that of a shamelessly partisan propagandist of Augustan ideology, and attempts to '(re-)gain … access' (p. 77) to a poem that can only be considered *Menschheitsdichtung* if we 'restrict' *Mensch* 'to the ruling class and its adherents' (p. 427).

Many scholars will find it difficult to share S.'s methodological and theoretical premises. Virgil's text always has *one* fixed and 'valid' (p. 359) meaning, that the author wished to be understood uncontroversially and unanimously by his implied readers. Our duty is to 'recover' both such authorial intention and the understanding of its 'reader or hearer … the Roman boy or man who, in the new national epic, learns to admire his Emperor's ancestor' (p. 22). We are only allowed to achieve this with the help of 'objective, non-literary, evidence' (p. ix) or else with contextual evidence from the poem itself; we cannot, as the intertextuals do, 'extend the use of Vergil's models in the interpretation of the *Aeneid* beyond the function that they are assigned to by the Vergilian context' (p. 96).

Inevitably, however, this 'Roman boy' will appear to many as nothing more than an artificial construction, an illusory foil to unrecoverable authorial intention, whose supposed

existence is no less fallacious (a problem that S. simply 'foregoes discussing', p. 150). Similarly deceptive (in line with D. Fowler's objections, which S. only attempts to overcome by dismissing 'committed polysemy-seekers', p. 253) is the objectivity of non-literary evidence, since monuments cannot speak unless they are made to. No scholar will be surprised to read that Aeneas' walk at Pallanteum takes him through the foreshadowed major monuments and sites of Augustan Rome (Chapter 6), but such parallels are bound to remain inert unless their significance is activated by the reader's inferences, whose objectivity is indeed very hard to test. Far from being 'hyper-logical' (an accusation that S. 'hopes to escape', p. 157), S.'s approach ends up entangled in the same gyres of 'circular reasoning' of which he accuses his opponents.

The book's arguments are readily summarised. Chapter 6 aside, S. is devoted to demonstrating how Virgil highlights Turnus' ethical flaws, and his violation of divine will, in order to build up our expectation of his deserved death in the final scene. Chapter 5 prepares us for S.'s final reading of the Allecto scene as an allegory for Turnus' psychological processes by providing a parallel reading of Dido as equally guilty of her actions.

Since the book, as S. concedes, 'may not have to say anything basically new on the *Aeneid*' (p. 176), it is mostly devoted to dismantling some of the most canonical scholarship (R. Thomas, M. Putnam, D. Quint, G.B. Conte, D. Feeney). Otherwise, S. reads and summarises Virgil's text as it suits him best, without reporting interpretations that fall outside the 'Optimistic' vs 'Pessimistic' dichotomy. When speculation is attempted, the result is surprisingly reductive: for example, Aeneas may give Helen's *uelamen* to Dido because 'he'd like to see her wrapped in the enhancements of a beautiful woman', and her reaction to the gifts (1.713 *ardescitque tuendo*) underscores her inherent character flaws, 'the usual male cliché of a woman whose judgment is affected … by presents that flatter her vanity' (p. 200).

Often S. fails to practise the methodology he preaches. He engages in intratextuality to his own advantage (e.g. pp. 56–8, connecting Aeneas' attitude in Books 2 and 12 on the basis of *meorum* at 2.431 and 12.947 and *furor iraque* [2.316] and *furiis … et ira* [12.946]), and opens on a contradiction, by claiming that Virgil's verifiable intention can only be recovered by strictly following the *Aeneid*'s narrative sequence (p. 2) and yet starting to interpret from Book 12 because Virgil himself 'rated [the second half] more important', a *maius opus* (p. 1). S.'s 'difficulties … are enhanced by the fact that Vergil wrote poetry, not history' (p. 381). He too must sometimes resort to unproven speculation (see pp. 118–19, the crime of the Danaids as a reference to Pallas' rather than Turnus' death) or to 'acrobatics' (Aeneas' human sacrifice in Book 10 must be read as pious because Evander at 11.170 says that Pallas' funeral was bestowed by *pius Aeneas*). When admitting that Virgil 'makes it so complex – almost misleading … for his reader to get to the bottom of Turnus' impious soul' (p. 415), he postulates 'less sophisticated' readers who would rejoice in a positive, but superficial, picture of '"their" Italian hero Turnus' (p. 424). And yet Dido's supporters are mistakenly guided by 'feminist interests' and 'trained to see Dido through the tear-filled eyes of the boy Augustine' (p. 184), whom we discover here to be the first feminist reader of *Aeneid* 4, and the only one worth mentioning. Most controversial is S.'s interpretation of how Virgil allocates guilt to Dido and Turnus and innocence to the Trojans. Contrary to his tenets, S. is obliged to resort to texts other than the *Aeneid* (Cicero, Homer, even tragedy, whose scholars' use in understanding Dido he deplores as 'circular reasoning' in Chapter 5) to show that Cupid's and Allecto's interventions must be considered allegories of psychological processes that underline Dido's and Turnus' ethical flaws and picture them as responsible for their actions. While Dido and Turnus are not pawns in the hands of destiny, it is nevertheless that very same 'Destiny's will' that 'exculpates Aeneas' and allows us to compare the

Trojans' legitimate and *involuntary* conquest of Italy with the 'arguments advanced by ancient – and modern – historians about Rome's allegedly involuntary conquest of the Mediterranean' (p. 388). While the reader must not impute to S. the dangerous ideology that he ascribes to Virgil, it is difficult to understand why he must resort to such doublethink in accommodating Virgil's view of destiny and divine intervention in ways that, as he would say, 'are not expressly stated by the author' (p. 161).

I have only sketched some of my issues with a book that claims to be engaged in a fight for truth and objectivity comparable to that of Darwinists against Creationists (p. 235). My last concern regards the lack of representation of twenty-first-century Virgilian scholarship. In what is a surprisingly brief bibliography for such a long book, only twelve items postdate 2006 (three by S. and three by A. Powell, the book's editor and author of *Virgil the Partisan* [2008] for the same series) and only 31 postdate the year 2000 (six by S.). Nowadays, the issues treated in the book are rarely dealt with as if the questions that they pose about authorial intention and implied readership could find such straightforward answers. The debate has moved instead towards what has long made the poem and the ideological system that it was undoubtedly part of such a minefield for contrasting political readings and tensions. While few academics would get away with not taking into consideration the last sixteen years of academic work in the field, S. and the editor feel justified in simply acknowledging the writer's bracketed dismissal of what he calls the 'unintentionalists' (p. 150). This must be a worrying situation. But I shall play the optimist and trust that S.'s post-2016 readers are by now used to being wary of claims to final and absolute truth.

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ASCANIUS IN THE *AENEID*

ROGERSON (A.) *Virgil's Ascanius. Imagining the Future in the* Aeneid. Pp. viii + 237. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Cased, £75, US$99.99. ISBN: 978-1-107-11539-2.
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This slim volume intensively explores the background, representations and implications of Virgil's Ascanius. The monograph demonstrates a fruitful broadmindedness about the function of character in epic as a repository of signifiers and thus a worthy object of semiotic interpretation. While the *Aeneid* that emerges may be a familiar one to Anglophone 'pessimists' preoccupied with the epic's delays, alternatives and inconsistencies (pp. 11–12), the sharp focus on Ascanius and strong intratextual readings provide many persuasive re-evaluations of key individual episodes. The brief chapters juxtapose examples effectively and link together well to make a convincing case for taking Ascanius seriously.

Chapters 2 and 3 on the inconclusive Italian genealogy and troubling Trojanness of Ascanius' naming establish ambiguities about Aeneas' Trojan son in the pre-Virgilian tradition that are important for the argument, but contain information and sources familiar to most Virgilians at least since A. Erskine, *Troy between Greece and Rome: Local Tradition and Imperial Power* (2001). Subsequent chapters feature R.'s skills in drawing intratextual comparisons, and her close attention to Virgilian language and self-allusion generates fresh insights. Chapter 4 links the Andromache and Dido episodes through both women's attachment to a child *imago*: Ascanius' disturbing resemblance to the lost Astyanax and the