

ARTICLES

The Vergilian Century*

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The turn of the century seems an opportune moment to take stock, to look back and to look forward. And like many other students of Latin literature, I have felt for a number of years that our discipline is in the midst of an important change. As a Vergilian, I reflexively think about these matters in terms of the author to whom I am most committed. But as someone with interests in the motifs and processes that shape scholarly discourse, I recognize that Vergilian terms may not be sufficient to account for the changes in which we are all involved.

Even if I correct for the fact that I am a Vergilolator, it seems to me obvious that Latin literary studies have for a long time been driven mainly by the study of Vergil. In schools and colleges, Vergil has long held pride of place in course syllabi and reading lists. In scholarship, books and articles on Vergil, and especially on the *Aeneid*, are produced in great abundance; and more often than not it is through Vergil that new critical directions are established. If we consider scholarly careers, how few of the most influential latinists of our time have made their mark without writing on Vergil? And how many have risen to prominence without writing very much on anyone else?

But this state of affairs is not necessarily the natural order of things. In the nineteenth century, Vergil's importance, while great, had not yet expanded to the same proportions that it attained later

* The text of this paper is fundamentally unaltered from the one that was delivered at the The Vergilian Century conference on November 17, 2000. The paper was delivered a second time at the 100th anniversary of the New York Classics Club on February 3, 2001. Apart from stylistic revision and additional documentation, the main changes I have made involve the addition of notes in which I try to represent questions and criticisms that I received on both occasions and in discussions since these ideas were first formulated. My purpose now, as it was then, remains that of opening a discussion rather than attempting to forestall any possible objection. I therefore prefer to incorporate other points of view and changes of mind as I have done in the spirit of discussion rather than erasing all trace of my original, unmodified position.

on. Only with the publication of Heinze's landmark study of *Vergils epische Technik* and Norden's commentary on *Aeneid* 6 does the study of Vergil begin to assume a position of leadership.¹ Over time, the scope of this leadership grows. To put the matter more provocatively, Vergil eventually became not only the most important *epic* poet of Roman antiquity, but the most important *elegiac*, *lyric*, and *dramatic* poet as well; not only the most important Augustan poet, but the most important Republican, Neronian, or Flavian poet too. This is true because the terms in which Vergil has been studied have tended to be taken as paradigmatic for students of other genres and periods.

The hegemony of Vergilian studies begins in earnest after the Second World War. Indeed, the year 1950, the midpoint of the century, is a focal point of our discussion, because in that year two works of fundamental importance appeared. The first is Viktor Pöschl's *Die Dichtkunst Vergils*.² The second work — shorter, but hardly less important — was Bernard Knox' paper on "The Serpent and the Flame."³ Few works of criticism have been as influential as these, and I would like to discuss both their influence and the values that they represent.

The main lines of Pöschl's argument are routinely taught as essential perspectives for anyone who wishes to understand the *Aeneid*. For our purposes today, however, it is more important to remember that Pöschl conceived of this work as an act of atonement, whether personal, national, or both, for the war that had torn Europe apart in the years just before it was written. Remember that Pöschl's stated purpose is, and I quote, to "re-establish a firm place for the

¹ Richard Heinze, *Vergils epische Technik* (Leipzig and Berlin 1903; 3d ed. 1915, rpt. 1928); Eduard Norden, *P. Vergilius Maro Aeneis Buch vi* (Leipzig and Berlin 1903; 3d ed. 1927). As of this writing both books were still in print. Heinze's book was translated into English some ninety-one years after it first appeared in German (*Virgil's Epic Technique*, tr. Hazel and David Harvey and Fred Robinson, pref. Antonie Wlosok (Berkeley 1993)). See the important review — remarkably, the first review of Heinze to appear in English — by Alessandro Barchiesi in *JRS* 86 (1996) 229–31.

² Viktor Pöschl, *Die Dichtkunst Vergils: Bild und Symbol in der Aeneis* (Innsbruck 1950; Berlin and New York 1977); English translation by Gerda Seligson, *The Art of Vergil: Image and Symbol in the Aeneid* (Ann Arbor 1962).

³ B. M. W. Knox, "The Serpent and the Flame: The Imagery of the Second Book of the *Aeneid*," *AJP* 71 (1950) 379–400. The article has been reprinted many times.

Aeneid as one of the bibles of the Western world.”⁴ This is clearly a motive that recalls an influential earlier contribution, Theodor Haecker’s *Vergil Vater des Abendlandes*.⁵ Pöschl’s book, like Haecker’s, was translated into several languages; but Pöschl took the particularly moving step of ensuring that the English translation would be made by his old friend and fellow student Gerda Seligson, who had been forced to flee Germany and National Socialism to the United States, where she taught for many years at the University of Michigan.⁶ This act of atonement on Pöschl’s part fixes Vergil scholarship at that moment to two important historical processes. Looking backward, it attempts to restore a sense of international community and common cultural purpose that were at least imagined to have existed before the Second World War. Looking ahead, it maps the *translatio imperii* that brought leadership in Latin studies from Germany to the United States.

An aspect of this movement involved some Americans in adopting the pan-European values that Pöschl represents. Brooks Otis, a great admirer of earlier German work on Vergil, is perhaps the best exemplar. In his famous book of 1964, *Virgil: A Study in Civilized Poetry*, Otis not only borrowed heavily from German scholars like Heinze and Pöschl, but actually ventured a comparison between Vergil and another great pillar of western culture, Ludwig van Beethoven. In his chapter on the Odyssean *Aeneid*, Otis compares the ending of book 6 to that of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony.⁷ In a later article on the development of Vergil’s style, he went farther, suggesting that the remarkable tonal changes that one observes across the four books of the *Georgics* might be most accurately described in musical terms — *allegro*, *andante*, *maestoso*, and so forth — and even speculated on whether the poem might have influenced Beethoven in the composition of his symphonies.⁸ How seriously Otis made this suggestion I don’t know, but his larger point, namely

⁴ I quote from Seligson’s translation (above, note 2) p. 12.

⁵ Theodor Haecker *Vergil: Vater des Abendlands* (Leipzig 1931).

⁶ On Pöschl see the obituary by Antonie Wlosok in *Gnomon* 73 (2001) 369–78.

⁷ Brooks Otis, *Virgil: A Study in Civilized Poetry* (Oxford 1964) 305. A recent reprint of Otis’ book (Norman 1995) contains an excellent forward by Ward W. Briggs, Jr. evaluating the importance of Otis’ work and its place in twentieth-century Vergilian studies (vii–xiii).

⁸ Otis, “Virgilian Narrative in the Light of its Precursors and Successors,” *Studies in Philology* 53 (1976) 1–28.

that Vergil and Beethoven are figures of comparable importance in the history of Western cultural identity, is hard to miss.

But Otis was committed to a particular view of Vergil, one that has come to be called “optimistic,” and was among those who resisted the rise of “pessimistic” readings as the anachronistic byproduct of New Left politics and the Viet Nam War.⁹ Now, long after such readings have gained so much legitimacy, it is worth turning Otis’ Beethoven comparison into a question: what sort of musical parallels would one draw today? In light of the critical battles that have been fought over Vergil’s relationship to an authoritarian regime, the most appropriate comparison seems to me with Dmitri Shostakovich. Here we find a modern example of an artist who served an authoritarian regime, but whose attitude towards that regime remains both an enigma and a hotly contested subject of scholarly debate.¹⁰ Like Vergil’s Augustus question, Shostakovich has

⁹ Ibid. 27.

¹⁰ The Shostakovich debate began with the publication of *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich as related to and edited by Solomon Volkov*; trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York: Harper & Row 1979), which purported to be a deathbed revelation that Shostakovich’s life of service to the Soviet state belied the conscience of a dissenter and free-thinker. *Testimony* created a sensation and quickly polarized musicologists and students of Russian culture into those who welcomed evidence that the great artist was in fact a free thinker, and those who attacked the memoir’s authenticity. Champions of the revisionist school include Ian MacDonald, *The New Shostakovich* (London: Fourth Estate, 1990), and Allan B. Ho and Dmitry Feofanov in *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (London: Toccata Press, 1998). Among the most persistent skeptics is Laurel E. Fay, both in her critique of *Testimony* (“Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose *Testimony*?” *Russian Review* 39 [1980] 484–93) and in her recent biography of the composer (*Shostakovich: A Life* [Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000]). For a relatively balanced survey of the controversy through the early nineties, see David Fanning, ed. *Shostakovich Studies* (Cambridge, 1995). The debate has been conducted in heated, at times even vitriolic terms, of which many in the scholarly community have clearly grown weary. In her summary of a Glasgow University conference entitled “Shostakovich 25 Years On,” organized by Alexander Ivashkin on 27–29 October 2000, Pauline Fairclough reports that “A significant number of scholars...were careful to emphasise the complex nature of Soviet cultural and political life, stressing that to view Shostakovich’s music or his persona in a straightforward ‘for-or-against-communism’ manner diminishes the multifaceted nature of musical meaning and paints the composer in absurdly crude colours.” In his closing remarks at this conference, revisionist Dmitry Feofanov declared “that the ‘Shostakovich wars’ were now over and that ‘Shostakovich has won.’” Fairclough comments that this declaration echoed

his own Stalin question; and it is instructive to consider the Latin poet a forerunner of the Soviet rather than of the Viennese composer.

What brought about this change in perspective? Our second great work of 1950, Knox' paper on "The Serpent and the Flame," shares with Pöschl's book many of the techniques associated with formal analysis. But Knox' essay is one of the earliest and also one of the purest New Critical readings of any classical text. It is, in fact, one of those rare examples of critical essay that uses a work of ancient Latin literature to illustrate a cutting-edge approach to literary analysis.

It did not happen immediately, but before long Knox's New Criticism became the normal way of reading Latin poetry, especially of the Augustan period.¹¹ This is one of the clearest examples I can cite of the way in which Vergilian scholarship in the second half of the last century assumed a position of hegemony with respect to the field as a whole. And I believe it is also the case that New Critical reading strategies facilitated the bifurcated reaction that characterized Vergil criticism for most of the past fifty years. But New Criticism alone does not account for this change. To understand what happened, we must broaden our focus.

Up to this point, I have been considering the history of scholarship from a very traditional perspective, that of great men and great books. But now, I want to alter course. Instead, I want to try to understand changes in scholarly direction with reference to the intellectual climate of the times rather than to the remarkable insight of

those of another conference participant, antirevisionist musicologist Richard Taruskin, "rather bizarrely, since neither Taruskin, Fay, Feofanov nor any other of the participants in the so-called 'debate' have changed their mind on a single issue. It may be that there is a general sense that it is now time, as Taruskin put it, to 'move on'. Let us hope so." (Fairclough's summary is available on line at <http://pages.britishlibrary.net/rma.news/shostakovich25.htm>.) I am grateful to Cristle Collins Judd for discussing *l'affair Shostakovich* and its parallels with late-twentieth-century Vergilian criticism.

¹¹ The tale has been told a number of times from varying perspectives. See Franco Serpa, *Il punto su Virgilio* (Rome, 1987) 46–88; S. J. Harrison, "Some Views of the *Aeneid* in the Twentieth Century" in *Oxford Readings in Vergil's Aeneid* (Oxford, 1990) 1–20; Charles Martindale, "Introduction: 'The Classic of All Europe,'" in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil* (Cambridge, 1997) 1–18, esp. p. 15 n. 31; Christine Perkell, "Editor's Introduction" in *Reading Vergil's Aeneid: An Interpretive Guide* (Norman, 1999) 3–28, esp. 16–22.

some particular individual. It is of course true that individuals are the actors through whom the forces that shape history do their work. But recent scholarship emphasizes how much the work of individuals, even those of great genius, depends on what collective forces allow us to think and do at any given time. This has been an emerging theme in recent efforts to understand the workings of Augustan culture two thousand years ago. As Alessandro Barchiesi has memorably put it, “‘Anti-Augustanism’ is a weak position, with a very weak name; who knows what it really meant to be ‘against’?”¹² I take this formulation to signify both in a limited sense that opposition to an idealized or normative “Augustanism” can hardly be regarded as an efficacious force in the political and social life of first-century Rome, and also in an extended sense that would identify “Augustanism” with the Foucauldian epistemic system of what it was possible in that time and place to think and to know.

But this way of thinking about the first century is no less applicable to the twentieth. “Anti-Augustanism” in this context was attacked by Otis and others as the anachronistic product of New Left politics in the sixties and seventies, and has more recently been questioned along the lines that Barchiesi adumbrates in passages like the one quoted above. I suggest that we might go just a bit farther in trying to understand the Anti-Augustanism of the last decades not as an illegitimate incursion of contemporary political belief into the dispassionate study of antiquity, but in relation to its opposite — readings like those of Otis, for example — as a necessary and inevitable part of how antiquity had to be constructed in the postwar World War II decades, and therefore as something no more or less anachronistic or illegitimate than the critical reactions of any previous or future age.

Why do I say this? First of all, the political history of the twentieth century was dominated by the collapse of the great empires that had been built up during by rival European states. Between the World Wars, competition between these empires to exploit less developed nations gave way to a struggle between free and fascist

¹² Alessandro Barchiesi, *Il poeta e il principe: Ovidio e il discorso augusteo* (Rome 1994). I quote from the American edition, *The Poet and the Prince: Ovid and Augustan Discourse* (Berkeley 1997) 272. Barchiesi makes the same point in “Endgames: Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 15 and *Fasti* 6” in *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature*, ed. Deborah H. Roberts, Francis M. Dunn, and Don Fowler (Princeton 1997) 208.

states. The war that destroyed fascism gave rise to a “cold war” that in many ways replicated the conflict between the allies and the axis powers in World War II, but with the important difference that this war was waged between superpowers that, despite their similarities, sought to represent one another as absolute opposites according to a binary logic of Manichean character. I will not try to define the epistemic world of the late twentieth century in thoroughgoing terms. Neither can I say whether the political and military events that I have just outlined produced the conditions that limited what it was possible to think and know during that time, or whether these events were products of the underlying epistemic system. What I do want to suggest is that the most important developments in Latin studies during this period parallel those in the political realm in three important respects. These are as follows.

First, as I mentioned previously, the center of critical activity in Latin studies shifted decisively around mid-century from Europe to the United States. This is a point that hardly needs arguing.¹³

Second, the rise of American power both in world politics and in the more circumscribed world of Latin literary studies, is paralleled by a marked increase in the amount of Vergil scholarship that is produced, and in the prestige of Vergilian studies within Latin studies as a whole. This increase has led to some paradoxical effects. How many teachers advise their students not to work on Vergil on the grounds that too much had already been written, that it is almost impossible for a novice scholar, or even an experienced one, to find something to say about Vergil that had not been said before *and* was worth saying? This is actually true. But despite this fact, it is no exaggeration to say that, during the second half of the twentieth century, publishing original work on Vergil has been about the most effective thing that an ambitious young latinist could do to advance his or her career. I think we have to admit that the standard of origi-

¹³ I reproduce exactly the intentionally provocative phrasing of this statement as it was made at The Vergilian Century conference on November 17, 2000. It will come as no surprise that the statement did not go unchallenged, particularly by those participants who have spent all or part of their careers in other countries. Nevertheless, I believe that the point stands up to scrutiny. Quite apart from the importance of American political, military, and cultural hegemony, the sheer number of programs in the United States and the size of the North American classical profession (and thus of its publishing market), which greatly expanded after mid-century, are perhaps the primary factors that account for this shift.

nality has not always been very high, and that often all that was necessary was to find a reasonably honorable way of taking sides in a highly polarized debate that no one could hope to, or even wanted to, move beyond an impasse that grew more impassible with each passing year.

This brings me to the third and last parallel development. As I noted above, the imperialist ideology that died in the Second World War hid competition between the European powers for geopolitical advantage under the veil of a culture that all these powers shared and that the colonized peoples over whom they ruled, did not. The *Aeneid* was often found to be a useful text on which to base the idea both of a unified European culture and therefore of Europe's right to rule the world. But when the illegitimate dictatorships of Hitler and, especially, Mussolini adapted imperialist ideologies to purposes of pseudo-nationalistic self-aggrandizement, and the culturally unified Europe of the past dissolved first into a theater of two world wars, and then into a pair of buffer zones controlled by superpowers from beyond the pale of European rule, the notion that Vergil's epic remained a foundational text for Western cultural integrity wore a bit thin. Instead, it came to be read as an avatar of the struggle between militarist and pacifist forces that dominated cultural life in the cold war period. Within this binary system of interpretation, it was common to assert that those who read the *Aeneid* as a justification of Roman imperialism were reading the poem as Vergil had intended, as it had always been read, and (most importantly in my view) *as it had been read before the Cold War*. Anti-imperialist readings, by contrast, were judged to be unprecedented in the history of Vergil criticism, anachronistic products of contemporary political concerns. But in fact, both the imperialist and the anti-imperialist schools owe their existence to the limits imposed on them by the epistemic conditions of the late twentieth-century. The anti-imperialists certainly do express themselves in terms that are inescapably implicated in the politics of the Cold War. But it is a serious mistake to identify the imperialist position of the post-World War II decades, with the imperialist position of the early twentieth century. They are cognate, but not the same, related precisely as the Winston Churchill's convictions about the legitimacy of the British empire are related to Dwight Eisenhower's convictions about the United States' obligations as the leader of the free world. So for the Cold War years, we should perhaps speak not of imperialist and anti-imperialist read-

ings, but of militarist and pacifist readings, since the debate between these two camps is not over whether empires should exist or not, but whether geopolitical goals should be pursued by military or pacific means. It was a shrewd debating tactic on the part of the militarists to allege that the pacifists were speaking not to the concerns of first-century Rome, but to those of Madison and Berkeley in the sixties. But if the pacifists were spokesmen for the New Left, the militarists were speaking for Robert McNamara and the Johnson administration, and not for Vergil, Augustus, Charlemagne, Bismark, Friedrich August Wolf, or Theodor Mommsen.

The important point is not that Cold War America produced pacifist readings of the *Aeneid* for the first time in history (whether or not that happens to be the case¹⁴), but that it produced a binary debate about the *Aeneid* that paralleled the binary debate about American foreign policy at a time when the country was locked in a binary struggle against the world's only other superpower, and when it was assumed that the outcome of that struggle would decide between the survival and the destruction of the entire world.

I see, then, a parallelism involving the United States' emergence as a superpower in the Cold War context, the hegemony of American scholarship in Latin literary studies during this same period, and the exaggerated importance assumed by work on Vergil within this field.¹⁵ The parallel developments are, I think, real. What ties them to one another, beyond mere simultaneity?

¹⁴ For an attempt to argue that what I am calling "pacifist" readings are no recent phenomenon, see Richard F. Thomas, *Virgil and the Augustan Reception* (Cambridge 2001).

¹⁵ Since the time of The Vergilian Century conference, I have given more thought to the possibility that the binarism that I emphasized then and continue to emphasize now, may in fact be a peculiarly American phenomenon. It certainly was the case that European and especially German reactions to the oppositional readings produced in the United States was great: see, for instance, Antonie Wlosok, "Vergil in der neueren Forschung," *Gymnasium* 80 (1973) 129–50; Ernst A. Schmidt, "The Meaning of Vergil's *Aeneid*: American and German Approaches," *CW* 94 (2000) 145–71. It is also true that oppositional readings arose in other parts of the world: consider the work of Anthony Boyle, now in Los Angeles but for many years in Australia, where the journal that he edits, *Ramus*, has been for years an important venue for new and heterodox work on the classics. In the seventies, such work often took the form of anti-Augustan readings of Latin poetry. Such examples notwithstanding, Stephen Hinds' remarks at the time of the conference, suggesting that the geopolitical realities of the Cold War era looked far less dualistic

The answer to this question can only be speculative, but I think there is one worth suggesting; and it brings us back again to the rise of New Criticism. As I mentioned before, Knox' paper on "The Serpent and the Flame" is a foundational text for later interpretations of Latin poetry. But in truth, Knox' paper has more in common with New Criticism as in the field of English than with the ethos that came to dominate in Latin studies. "The Serpent and the Flame" powerfully exhibits the New Critical privileging of "tension" as the element that animates a poem. In Book 2 of the *Aeneid*, Knox finds the images of serpent and flame deployed in various and even contradictory ways: first as the serpents that devour Laocoon and his sons and as the fire that devours Troy, then later as the flames that, serpent-like, lick the locks of Ascanius and convince Anchises to leave the dying city. For Knox, the diverging tendencies of this imagery result in a productive tension that energizes the poem and moves the plot from the negativism of Troy's fall in a positive direction towards the founding of Rome. This is classic New Critical stuff. But it was not long before these productive tensions would come to be viewed in quite different terms. With hindsight, it is almost surprising that Knox did not make the move that soon became reflexive and almost inevitable, namely, that of reading the negative associations of serpent and flame imagery as somehow undermining the hopeful omen of the flames licking Ascanius' hair. It is not the case, so far as I am aware, that in other domains New Critical methods produced resisting readers to the extent that they unarguably did in our field. In Latin studies, New Critical tension has been read, almost always, as contradiction and, therefore, as an invitation to the reader to read below the surface and against the grain, to look for subtexts that subvert the surface meaning, and even to privilege subtext at the expense of meanings that are more accessible. Very quickly, productive tension gave way to ambiguity, ambivalence, anxiety, and other forms of suspicion.

to those who happen not to be living in one of the two superpowers, provided one stimulus to reconsider my original position. Further encouragement came from conversation with Glenn Most, who urged me to consider the relentlessly dualistic nature of American domestic politics as a context for late twentieth-century reactions to Vergil, in contrast to the less binary political systems of most European nations. I would now be inclined to express approximately the same views as I did originally, but in terms recalibrated to take into account the views of these persuasive interlocutors.

Now, it is a very good question why this happened to New Critics working in the field of Vergilian studies, who exported this attitude to Latin studies in general, but not in other fields. There is no simple answer, but part of one may be that the *Aeneid* is inescapably a poem about political power. By this time, many of us have become accustomed to the idea that all discourse is about power; but for Cleanth Brooks writing about well-wrought urns in 1947, and seeking to explicate poetry by using a method that self-consciously turned its back on traditional, positivistic reading strategies, it was probably very easy to ignore the political implications of his material. For Knox explicating *Aeneid* 2 by the same methods, the political context of Augustan Rome was much more relevant.¹⁶ And the more pervasively historicist ideology of classical studies as a discipline probably ensured that those who followed Knox would never ignore political considerations to the extent that was possible in English studies.

The political themes of the *Aeneid* — *translatio imperii*; the rise to power of immigrant peoples; the restoration of peace through war — seem to speak directly to the chief concerns of Cold War America. Viewed in this way, how could the *Aeneid* have failed to become a battleground of competing Cold War ideologies? And how could such a remarkable confluence of political and intellectual forces into the study of such a text fail to work a powerful influence on the field that surrounded it?

With this I come to the final part of my thesis. My argument is not just about why Vergil scholarship rose to unprecedented heights of prestige and influence in Cold War America. There is another, equally important element; namely, this. The period of Vergilian hegemony is over. Not that Vergil has become irrelevant, or that the *Aeneid* will not continue to be studied; but I believe we have already entered a period during which Vergil is no longer the single most important paradigm for Latin literary studies; when the questions that we most want to answer are no Vergilian ones; when the approaches that we take to Vergil are imported from work on different authors, and frequently not with authors at all, instead of the other way around.

¹⁶ I refer the reader to Joy Connolly's paper in this volume on the convergence of New Criticism and pastoral poetics. Connolly argues an intriguing counterpoint, grounded in differences of genre, to the theme I am articulating here

I base this view partly on the historical fact that the Cold War period is over. Of course it is simplistic to assume a direct causal relationship between historical events and the immediate concerns of Latin scholars. But if the kind of thinking about Vergil that took shape in the fifties and sixties hardened into an inflexible dichotomous impasse by the late seventies and eighties, does this situation not mirror the predicament of Cold War politics? And if the lack of clear focus in Latin studies today parallels the uncertain geopolitical situation of our times, does this not corroborate that point of view?

To leave world politics for a moment, let me relate an anecdote. Once when I was thinking about organizing a conference on Ovid, I invited a distinguished latinist from another American institution if he wanted to participate.¹⁷ He hemmed and hawed for awhile, until finally he got to the point. "I loathe Ovid," he said. I found this a remarkable confession for a professor of Latin with a strong interest in Augustan poetry. But he went on. "In my view," he said, "one is either a Vergilian or an Ovidian." Again I was taken aback, and pointed out that Richard Heinze, Brooks Otis, William Anderson, and others had made important contributions to both Vergilian and Ovidian studies. My friend indulged me awhile before insisting that his basic point stood; and, in case I was still confused on this point, he declared himself a Vergilian.

Now all of this happened about fifteen years ago; so at that time a distinguished scholar and critic of Latin poetry felt that this was a respectable opinion to express to a younger colleague. But such an opinion would be harder to understand today. The exchange took place when I was beginning to find Ovid really interesting for the first time — not just *as interesting* as Vergil, but interesting *in the same way* that Vergil is interesting, as a paradigm of how Latin poetry works and as a privileged literary space within which Augustan culture works out its most urgent, most difficult problems.

Not so long ago, it was not common to regard Ovid in this way. This was Vergil's territory. Ovid in those days, to most people, was everything that Vergil was not. If Vergil was serious, Ovid was frivolous. If Vergil was difficult, Ovid was easy. If Vergil's masterpiece, the *Aeneid*, was the Roman national epic, well, what *was*

¹⁷ The conference in question never came about. I have not divulged the name of the scholar or the institution. I note with amusement that several colleagues have taken the trouble to deny that they were the individual who is the subject of the story. All those denials made within my hearing were in fact truthful.

Ovid's masterpiece? The *Metamorphoses*? And who even knew if it was an epic?

Here I believe we can isolate exactly the change that has taken place. The *Aeneid* is, unambiguously, an epic; its ambiguity to twentieth-century readers involves the argument over whether it was a paean to Roman national achievement or a tragic lament for human failings. The question has proven to be unanswerable, and I am confident that it will remain so, precisely because it is designed to be unanswerable. It is the kind of question about which one can only argue with a committed opponent, and the argument has gone on for a long time, long enough that many of us have grown thoroughly sick of it. This does not mean that we lack our opinions. I am quite willing to declare myself a pacifist, but I am not willing to go on arguing the point against my militarist friends: I want to talk about something else.

Now one may start from the assumption that the *Aeneid* is profound and the *Metamorphoses* superficial; but most of us can agree that both poems are ambivalent, if in different ways. Collectively, latinists have defined the *Aeneid* as ambivalent about Augustus, and have argued about whether the poem is pro- or anti-Augustan. Some of the same people have had much the same argument about the *Metamorphoses*, but that conversation has proven harder to sustain. This may be an instance of exporting terms from Vergilian studies to another area where they simply don't fit as well.

The belief that these terms didn't fit Ovid as well as Vergil would once have been taken as proof that Ovid was inferior to Vergil. This is something that has definitively changed. For years, the classic ambivalence in Ovidian studies involved the generic status of the *Metamorphoses*. Heinze was certain about this: it was an epic, just as the *Fasti* was an elegy.¹⁸ Eventually scholars grew less satisfied with this formulation until they decided it just didn't matter very much.¹⁹ At length Stephen Hinds was able to show that it *did* matter and that the question actually *was* interesting.²⁰ And lest I

¹⁸ The case is argued in "Ovids elegische Erzählung," *Berichte der Sächsischen Akademie zu Leipzig. Philologisch-historische Klasse* 71.7. Leipzig 1919.

¹⁹ The case is put most forcefully, not to say vituperatively, by D. A. Little, "Richard Heinze: Ovids elegische Erzählung" in *Ovids Ars amatoria und Remedia Amoris: Untersuchungen zum Aufbau*, ed. Ernst Zinn (Stuttgart 1970) 64–105.

²⁰ Stephen Hinds, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone: Ovid and the Self-*

succumb once again to the great man theory of history and incur the charge of flatterer to boot, let me be clear about this point. I don't think, finally, that the important thing about *The Metamorphosis of Persephone* is that it proves once and for all that genre really *is* an important topic, or that Ovid is a more intricate and interesting poet than we had thought. The point is that the book used genre to begin reformulating the problem of ambivalence in a way that at just that moment seemed more useful than the Vergilian model. Vergilian ambivalence seems to force us to choose sides, either/or, about issues that matter a great deal and to argue without any hope that we will ever prevail. Ovidian ambivalence shows that it is useless to choose sides and invites us to adopt a position of both/and about issues that may matter very little, or that may mask issues of even greater importance than could ever be accommodated by the binary logic of the Vergilian universe, and to do so in a way that encourages us to sit back and enjoy the spectacle.²¹

History, I suggest, has prepared us for this change. It now appears to me that the pro/anti-Augustan arguments of the sixties and seventies especially are very little more than artifacts of a Cold War mentality that could conceive of power relations only in Manichean terms. I would also suggest that the new interest in Ovid and the most appealing ways of reading him have a lot to do with the fact that we have got tired of the Vergilian hegemony, particularly in its bifurcated form, just as we have rid ourselves of the binary politics of the Cold War and have had to accustom ourselves to a world in which there is only one superpower, for better or worse, but many lesser centers of residual or emerging power as well.²² The world is binary no more; and Ovid speaks to this condition more convincingly than Vergil. Vergil, it seems to me, is about dilemmas, Ovid about accommodations.

I will conclude with a brief parable about one way in which I believe the vector of influence between Ovid and Vergil has been reversed. In *The Rhetoric of Imitation*, Gian Biagio Conte drew a distinction between Vergilian and Ovidian modes of poetic memory.

conscious Muse (Cambridge 1987).

²¹ The image of spectatorship is borrowed from Barchiesi (note 12 above) 272.

²² It was always understood that the new geopolitical order would not necessarily be less risky than the old in every dimension. Events that have transpired since the time of the conference have illustrated that the new order entails risks of its own.

In Vergil, Conte argues, allusion seldom calls attention to itself as such. The reader has to infer that Aeneas at a certain point “is” Odysseus or Achilles. Ovid, on the other hand, seems to enjoy calling attention to the fact that he is making an allusion by allowing his characters to show an apparent awareness of the phenomenon: thus Mars quotes Ennius in reminding Jupiter of a promise to raise Romulus up to heaven. “I remember you once promised,” says the god of war to the father of gods and men, before quoting a promise that Jupiter had made in Ennius’ *Annales*.²³

Not long ago, it would have been normal to blame Ovid for doing things like this, things that seem to fall below the standard of seriousness and decorum that we derive from Vergil. Lately however I find myself moving in the other direction — not blaming Vergil for lacking an Ovidian sense of humor, but reading him according to principles derived from Ovid.²⁴ What if Vergil’s characters were really behaving like Ovid’s Mars all the time, without our knowing it?

I am beginning to think they do, and to show why, I will very briefly outline an argument about Juno in the *Aeneid*.²⁵ It begins with William Levitan’s observation that Juno’s first words in the poem — *mene incepto desistere uictam* — echo the first words of Homer’s *Iliad* — *menin aeide thea* — and continues with Don Fowler’s observation that this echo marks Juno as a kind of narrator, another voice alongside that of the primary narrator of the epic.²⁶ I think we can tease out further implications. What kind of narrator is Juno? One who opposes the master narrative of the poem and that of Augustan culture, as some would have it. But what about this question: Why does Juno start her narrative by quoting or echoing the *Iliad*?

Let me be clear about why this is important. The *Aeneid* begins as an *Odyssey*. The opening lines mention *arma uirumque* as the

²³ See Conte’s discussion of these lines in *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets* (Ithaca, 1986) 57–59.

²⁴ See Sara Myers’ review article “The Metamorphosis of a Poet: Recent Work on Ovid.” *JRS* 89 (1999) 190–204.

²⁵ This argument briefly encapsulates some of the themes of my current major project, a book on narrative, metapoetics, and dissent in the *Aeneid*.

²⁶ William Levitan, “Give up the Beginning? Juno’s Mindful Wrath (*Aeneid* 1.37),” *LCM* 18 (1993) 14–15; Don Fowler, “Virgilian Narrative: Story-Telling,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, ed. Charles Martindale (Cambridge 1997) 259–60.

theme, and readers since Servius and surely before have seen this as an indication that the poem will be both *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.²⁷ But on most readings, it begins as an *Odyssey* and only later develops into an *Iliad*. And in fact here at the beginning of the poem, the hero is about to encounter a very odyssean storm at sea.²⁸ So why does Juno start singing an *Iliad*?

Here let me borrow an Ovidian move and make Juno not just a narrator, but a transgressive character who competes with the epic narrator because she has a very specific purpose in mind. The narrator has just begun singing an odyssey. Juno appears to sing an *Iliad* instead. What *motive* would she have for doing so? If we seek our answer in narrative terms, it may be important to realize that Hera, Juno's counterpart, is a very minor character in the *Odyssey*. It is as if Juno realized what was happening, understood that Vergil's plan left her little or no role in the poem, that she might have to withdraw as soon as this first major episode had been composed — *mene incepto desistere uictam* (*Aeneid* 1.37). Therefore, she takes action: she begins her own story, and begins it by echoing Homer's *menin*, signalling her intention that the new poem be an *Iliad* instead of an odyssey. And the reason is not far to seek: Hera, though negligible in the Homeric *Odyssey*, is crucial to the *Iliad*. Juno therefore needs the *Aeneid* to be an *Iliad*, and not an odyssey; otherwise she will indeed withdraw in defeat from the beginning of the poem, as soon as it is begun.

This line of interpretation, which extends to many particulars, also involves the largest aspects of the poem's Homeric program. I will confine myself to just two points. First, as I mentioned before, it is normal to regard the *Aeneid* as a poem that is both an odyssey and an *Iliad*. Juno's pretensions show instead, I think, that the correct model is not combination, but contest: Juno as narrator in effect

²⁷ Propertius 2.34.61–66 looms large here; just how large is carefully explored by Andrew Laird, "Design and Designation in Virgil's *Aeneid*, Tacitus' *Annals*, and Michelangelo's *Conversion of St. Paul*," in *Intratextualities: Greek and Roman Textual Relations* (Oxford, 2000) 151–52.

²⁸ The odyssean character of the storm is made clear by Aeneas' speech (1.92–101), his first in the poem, which quotes a speech of Odysseus in similar circumstances (*Odyssey* 5.297–312). The correspondence between these scenes was first noted by Fulvio Orsino, *Virgilius collatione scriptorum Gaecorum illustratus* (Antwerp 1568) according to G. N. Knauer, *Die Aeneis und Homer* (Göttingen 1964) 503.

strives with the epic narrator over whether the poem will be an odyssey *or* an iliad. Second, this contest has important implications for how we understand the character of Juno and the direction of the narrative as a whole. For if the epic narrator wants to sing an Odyssey, and Juno wants him to sing an iliad, we have to recognize that, by the end of the poem, Juno wins. The *Aeneid*, despite Juno's early efforts to hijack the narrative, begins as an odyssey; but it ends, with no ambiguity at all, as an iliad.²⁹ We may ask whether the narrator remains Juno's enemy, whether she wins him over to her side, as she does Jupiter in book 12, or whether this was part of the epic narrator's design all along.³⁰ I will not try to answer these questions at this time. Instead I will return to a point that I made earlier. This is a reading of the *Aeneid* that I probably would have found absurd only a few years ago. I might have accepted something like it as a reasonable approach to Ovid, and in fact it still looks to me like a way of thinking imported from Ovid. If I had listened to the friend who cautioned me that the world is divided between Ovidians and Vergilians, I probably would not have become comfortable enough with this way of reading Latin poetry to try it out on Vergil. But under other influences I did not listen, and I did try it, and it seems to me to work — and to give a very different account of Vergilian dilemmas. Perhaps this is just an illustration of a point that Stephen Hinds makes in *Allusion and Intertext*: that Vergil for us is a Vergil already mediated by Ovid.³¹ Would that point have seemed compelling twenty years ago? Impossible. Does it now? It may not be inescapable, but it is an idea that I think we have to take seriously. That is how much things have changed.

²⁹ Or does it? The *Aeneid* ends with the death of Turnus, which corresponds to the death of Hector, which is not the end of the *Iliad*. But according to G. N. Knauer (*Die Aeneis und Homer* [Göttingen, 1964] 322–27, 329), the end of the *Aeneid* alludes to the end of the *Odyssey* as well. See also Francis Cairns, *Virgil's Augustan Epic* (Cambridge, 1989) ch. 8, “The *Aeneid* as *Odyssey*.”

³⁰ On Juno and Jupiter at the end of the poem, see the classic pages of W. R. Johnson, *Darkness Visible: A Study of Vergil's Aeneid* (Berkeley, 1976) 123–30; cf. D. C. Feeney, “The Reconciliations of Juno,” *CQ* 34 (1984) 179–94.

³¹ Stephen Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (Cambridge 1998), 104–7 and 120. At 107 n. 13 Hinds constructs a brief genealogy of such readings. Cf. the discussion of Ovid's Vergil by Michael Putnam in this volume, esp. pp. 179–80 n. 10.

It is of course a rather big step from this observation to an acceptance of the idea that it is now Ovid, and not Vergil, who stands at the center of critical discussions of Latin poetry, and that Ovidian and not Vergilian issues are what now drive the field. It is still another, even larger step to explain these developments in terms of recent political events. Time rather than argument is what will ultimately prove or disprove these hypotheses. But in the meantime, I hope that the questions I have tried to raise will provoke others into offering explanations of their own as to how we got here and where we are going. Let me close by observing that, whatever perspective one adopts, this is a propitious time for Latin studies. Whatever the cause, the field seems to me to be reaping the benefits of a new openness. Whether or not that openness has anything to do with the Ovidian turn that I believe I have discerned, I welcome it as an attitude that will be propitious to the study of Vergil, Ovid, and every other aspect of Latin literature and Roman culture.

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