

## The Loom of Latin

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Let me begin with a bit of autobiography which I happily share with others in this room, including past, present and future presidents of our learned society. I came of age in the Harvard of the Fifties where it was my good fortune to study with two extraordinary teachers, J. P. Elder and Cedric Whitman. They served as notable models for the combination of philological rigor with imaginative insight they displayed in their scholarly writing—Elder in a series of sharply etched, brilliant essays on Catullus, Horace and Lucretius, Whitman through his reading of Sophocles but especially in the chapters on “Fire and Other Elements” and “Achilles” in his landmark book on Homer. After my return to pursue graduate work it was also my privilege to become the friend of Reuben Brower whose books, beginning with *The Fields of Light*, not to speak of his generosity of spirit and humanity as a pedagogue, served as models for a host of young educators-to-be.

What we learned to combine, first by osmosis, then by scrutiny of its intellectual background and prized texts, was the best of New Criticism with the training required of a philologist, to become, literally, lovers of words. The two were in important ways complementary. The bibles of New Criticism, works such as I. A. Richards’ *Practical Criticism* and *Seven Types of Ambiguity* by his student William Empson, allowed us to put our education to use, strengthening our understanding of the richness of meaning contained in our chosen works of genius. To view literature whole was a fundamental ambition, whether we discovered this unity through tracing strands of imagery, from observing figuration at work, or in the search for ring-composition. What we eschewed was the rigidity with which the New Critics tended to interpret writing *in vacuo*, apart from the various contexts which gave it birth.<sup>1</sup> Intellectual setting was crucial, signifying not only position vis-à-vis the output of a single author but placement

<sup>1</sup>This emphasis on the close reading of a work at the expense of its wider cultural horizons has been defined by Geoffrey Hartman, in the latest Haskins Lecture, as “salutary myopia” (17).

within the sweep of ancient literature and the works it influenced. Here in the background were John Livingston Lowes, on Coleridge's sources, and Caroline Spurgeon on Keats' use of Shakespeare—the theoretical beginnings, as it were, of the exploration of allusion which has become and will, I dare say, continue to be such a vital critical tool. There were many other powerful aids available to us for eliciting meaning, a few of which I will single out. For those interested in variations of style as representative of varied realities Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1946) was a beacon. There was also psychology, especially the work of Jung and his followers. I remember the potent impression caused by my first reading of Maud Bodkin's *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* and of Northrop Frye, writing first on Blake (1947), then, ten years later, *Anatomy of Criticism*. There were also many influential works emanating from historians of religion and myth. I think particularly of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, published a year before I entered college.

What we did not fully sense until some time had passed was that we were at the beginning of a renaissance in the study of Latin literature and, in particular, in the rethinking of the accomplishments of some of its major poets. Let me use Virgil as an example. The Virgil we were born into was the product of two main interpretative sources. The first was his designation as a chauvinistic glorifier of empire, a view propounded with authority in the pages of Richard Heinze's *Virgils epische Technik* (1903). His was a Virgil that had already fitted comfortably with English and German readers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The second Virgil was the creator of a hero perceived as passive in his responses, proto-Christian in his ethics, ever responding with sympathy to the world around him. This was the stoic Aeneas which T. S. Eliot put before us at the end of the second World War in *What is a Classic?* (1945) and which we also find five years later in Viktor Pöschl's *Die Dichtkunst Virgils* (1950). The combination brought down the wrath of Robert Graves, thundered in a pair of influential articles, and served, apparently, to offer continued evidence that Virgil's position in the hierarchy of epicists, was again less than supreme, certainly secondary to Homer, a position which, in recent centuries and for a variety of reasons, he had held since the death of Dryden.<sup>2</sup>

But other breezes were stirring. On the larger critical scene there was a reaction, on the part of influential scholars like Lionel Trilling, to the perceived lack

<sup>2</sup>I say "again" remembering Quintilian's comparison of Virgil with Homer. He quotes the judgment of his teacher (*Inst.* 10.1.86): *Utar enim verbis isdem quae ex Afro Domitio iuvenis excepi: qui mihi interroganti quem Homero crederet maxime accedere, 'secundus,' inquit, 'est Vergilius, propior tamen primo quam tertio.'*

of a broader, more humane vision on the part of the New Critics, whatever their virtues in claiming our exacting attention for texts themselves. The result was a new openness to the complexities of feeling, and therefore of presentation, made available by the greatest literature, and in particular a willingness to plumb the dark sides of human thoughts and emotions. It was in this regard that the work of Pöschl played another role. Even though he saw the *Aeneid* in terms of dark and light, evil and good, with the latter triumphant at the end, nevertheless it was he who helped teach us about Virgilian symbology, to engage with Virgil's emblematic way of pitting rational and irrational against each other. The same year that *Die Dichtkunst* appeared Bernard Knox published his seminal "The Serpent and the Flame" in the *American Journal of Philology*, reaffirming with different evidence the force of Virgil's imagery in the presentation of ideas. Three years later (1953) the same journal issued R. A. Brooks' "*Discolor aura: Reflections on the Golden Bough*" which pressed us to ponder still further Virgil's meditation on the ambiguities of history. Its publication served as a notable stimulus to those who in the next decades questioned as one-sided the view that Virgil embraced the myth of history as progressive, and proposed for him instead a more unsure, uncertain moral frame along with a more multivalent and problematic approach to reading human nature, especially the nature of those in authority. This frame seemed not dissimilar to life itself.

The effect of New Criticism, nevertheless, was a quiet revolution in the way Latin poets were read. In pressing us to confirm our vocation to examine the richness of words themselves, it helped to shake us loose from the exploration of Roman literature strictly through its Greek models, the assumption being that the emulating, later writers must be inferior to their originals. Poetry, we saw, was much more than a source for evidence to support a writer's biography or to evaluate the historical background against which it was written. It was not just a mine for grammatical or metrical data that needed quantification. The best aspects of "close reading" stay always with us as we expand our insights, and a poet of the force of Virgil grows in greatness *pari passu*. For the Virgil we were groping toward in the sixties would, I firmly believe, be thoroughly at home in our postmodern world, a world that shuns anything totalizing or authoritarian, assured only of the uncertainty of final meanings, of the open-endedness of interpretation, incomplete closures and conclusions more fragile than firm.

Let me offer an example drawn from the sweep of the Virgilian career, from its conclusion and its commencement. During the course of the last book of the *Aeneid* Virgil offers a series of signposts to serve as reminders of his first *Eclogue*, a dialogue, we remember, between two shepherds, one, Tityrus, able, through the good offices of a young god in Rome, to sing of Amaryllis under the beech tree's protection, the other, Meliboeus, about to be expelled from the

land because of the expropriations perpetrated by Rome, now in the form of a soldier styled both *impius* and *barbarus*. The poem is spaciouly programmatic for some of Virgil's enduring intellectual concerns, whether aesthetic or moral. We hear its words echoed first in *Aeneid* 12 from the lips of the disguised Juturna who conjures up for the Latins what will happen if the Trojans win the war and "we, with our fatherland lost" (*A.* 12.236 *nos patria amissa*) have to suffer proud overlords from abroad. In similar words Meliboeus describes himself and those evicted with him, the "we" who are losing our fatherland (*Ecl.* 1.3–4 *nos patriae ... nos patriam*). And when Aeneas initiates the razing of Latinus' city the poet uses the collocation, *discordia civis*, that he gives to Meliboeus to describe the consequences of Roman civil war (*A.* 12.583; *Ecl.* 1.71).

But Virgilian poetry offers still larger gestures of verbal parallelism. One, to which critics are becoming more and more sensitive, is the idea of shade which takes us, within the first *Eclogue*, from the *umbra* that shelters Tityrus in his freedom for song to the shadows of nightfall that complement the poem's end (*Ecl.* 1.4, 83).<sup>3</sup> These *umbrae* anticipate the shades in the Underworld that Aeneas encounters during the course of book 6 of his epic, whose number Turnus is soon to augment as, in the poem's last hexameter (12.952),

vita ... cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras.

his life with a groan flees resentful under the shades.

This valedictory line suggests a still further organizing principle for Virgil's spiritual legacy, namely the idea of exile and the meaning of the displacements it entails. If we look only at beginnings and endings of poems, we find the topic first mentioned by Meliboeus who, at the start of *Eclogue* 1, announces to Tityrus, as Virgil does to us readers, that "we are being exiled from our fatherland" (*Ecl.* 1.4 *nos patriam fugimus*). Aeneas, in the second line of his epic, is *profugus*, an exile wandering from Troy to Lavinium and the site of Rome. We find Daedalus, surrogate for hero and author alike, near the opening of book 6, fleeing Minos' Crete in order to practice his art in Italy, with equivocal results (*A.* 6.14 *fugiens*). Finally we have the life of Turnus, again in the epic's concluding line, escaping the results of Aeneas' mortal violence for an existence among ghosts.

As so often in his poetry, Virgil sets up a pattern that can be read in several ways. The multifaceted horror of Meliboeus' exile, from the interior landscape of pastoral song to the distant, excruciatingly real reaches of the Roman empire,

<sup>3</sup>The fundamental study is Smith. See also Theodorakopoulos.

is clear enough, and Turnus' relegation to the Underworld ends the epic on what it is temperate to call a somber note. Nevertheless Daedalus at least reaches Italy and Aeneas' necessary departure from the embers of Troy anticipates Rome to come and especially her golden glory under Augustus. But, if we overlay the first *Eclogue* upon the concluding book of the *Aeneid*, we find that Virgil has inculcated in us a subtle prejudice whose working we must ponder. His initial pastoral is built around a tension their colloquy establishes between the two shepherds, of whom one has his arcady of song preserved by distant Rome while the other suffers relegation from this pleasance by a more proximate, palpable, vicious application of Roman might. It remains for the reader to interpret the resulting friction.

By the time we reach the final book of the *Aeneid*, the heritage of Tityrus, which is to say the idealism that surfaces on important occasions throughout Virgil's texts, has been either skewed or elided entirely. The Tityran shade, which unifies *Eclogue* 1, taking us from protective arboreal cover to the sheltering dusk of nightfall, framing a bucolic day that, for the fortunate shepherd, will be repeated tomorrow and tomorrow, becomes the specters of death toward whom Turnus' life flees, and the villas' smoking rooftops that Tityrus particularizes for Meliboeus in his concluding idyllic vision of his *locus amoenus* (*Ecl.* 1.82 *culmina fumant*), become the smoking rooftops that Aeneas imagines will soon characterize Latinus' burning city (*A.* 12.569 *fumantia culmina*).<sup>4</sup> The idealizing of songs' setting and of a Rome supportive of freedom for a poet's imagination is gone entirely. What remains is Meliboeus, the victimized, in the persons of aged Latinus, his city about to be leveled, and of Turnus, slain by our hero who is no longer the passive endurer of Juno's resentment but now himself the terrifying embodiment of wrath at work. It doesn't take too great a leap of the imagination to interpret, to whatever degree we choose, victorious Aeneas as the spiritual, or even literal, equivalent of the Roman soldier both *impius* and *barbarus* whose presence forces Meliboeus into exile. After all, as Aeneas urges on his troops to the destruction of Latinus' city, he apostrophizes them as *cives* (*A.* 12.572).

Ovid helps us here by styling the sword with which Aeneas kills Turnus as *barbarus*, leaving us with the same ambiguity as does Virgil.<sup>5</sup> Aeneas, so the

<sup>4</sup>This is not to imply that the phrase lacks ambiguity in *Eclogue* 1.

<sup>5</sup>Ovid *Met.* 14.574. See also Hor. *Ep.* 1.2.7 for Troy as equivalent to *barbaria* (cf. also *barbarae turmae*, *Carm.* 2.4.9, and the use of *barbarum* to mean Phrygian at *Epode* 9.6). Herodotus (1.4.4) is apparently the first author to call the Trojans

adjective suggests, is at once both a foreigner and savage from incivility. He is the outsider whom fate has brought from distant parts to found Rome, the impoverished exile who over the course of epic time gains omnipotence. He has also become the insider, the Roman in power, who is likewise both *impius* and *barbarus*, impious for going against his father's ethical advice by killing a suppliant, and cruel in the doing, exiling Turnus to the shades just as the Roman *miles* of *Eclogue* 1 relegates Meliboeus from an anonymous landscape of creativity to points as specific as they are remote.

Virgil presents us at the end of the *Aeneid* with no happy resolutions, no parallels to Patroclus' funeral games or to the triple mourning for Hector that brings the *Iliad* to a patterned conclusion. We must wait until the year 1428, when the twenty-one year old Maphaeus Vegius publishes his *Supplementum* to Virgil's epic, for anything parallel to happen to the story line of the *Aeneid*. For in the course of Vegio's six hundred and thirty hexameters, peppered with speeches and embellished with similes, we find much realized that Virgil leaves inconclusive or untold. The gods receive due honor at the end of hostilities; heroes, especially Turnus, are mourned; funerals celebrated. Aeneas at last is wedded to Lavinia, founds his city to help unite Trojans and Latins and, after succeeding to the throne of his father-in-law, Latinus, in Vegio's finale suffers stellification at the hands of Venus, with Jupiter and the other gods, Juno included, applauding the event.

The fact that for sixty years after 1471, when it was attached to Adam de Ambergau's edition of the *Aeneid*, Vegio's *Supplementum* was regularly printed with texts of Virgil and that it was appended to the first two translations of the epic into English, those of Gavin Douglas (1513, but not printed until 1553) and of Thomas Phaer, completed by Thomas Twyne (1594), attests to its popu-

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barbarians. In the Horace *Epistle* Paris is therefore doubly "barbarian" for having caused the war that bears Troy's name.

To apply *barbarus* to the Trojans fighting the Italians is, on one level, to posit the transformation of the Itali into Greeks and envision the Trojans as "barbarians" vis-à-vis the "civilized" Rutulians. Meliboeus' designation of a Roman soldier as *barbarus*, therefore, furthers a potential intimacy between Roman, Trojan and barbarian, with the dispossessed Meliboeus representing civilization (cf. the placement Virgil has Meliboeus give *culta*, to describe his lands, between *impius* and *barbarus*, the attributes of the Roman *miles*, at *Ecl.* 1.70–71). The irony of such linkage would not have been lost on an audience pondering Octavian's pretensions at ancestry.

larity.<sup>6</sup> The satisfactions Vegio creates in the face of Virgil's omissions are clear enough, and their implementation rings, especially in his speeches, with a high moral tone that still resonates in Virgilian criticism: Turnus and the Latins suffered just punishment for unduly resisting the will of the gods, for claiming Aeneas' fated bride and breaking the treaty meant to achieve peace between the warring parties. Vegio even forges his own form of wholeness with the epic by concluding his essay in "completing" the *Aeneid* with Venus' deification of Aeneas, reminding the reader of Jupiter's prophecy to his mistrustful daughter, in *Aeneid* 1, that all will go well with Aeneas and with Rome to come.

The humanist's act of homage is, however, also in one prominent respect an act of criticism. Vegio and his Renaissance readers expected to find in Aeneas a paragon of virtue, a model for heroic behavior, especially in the moral employment of power. And this is what Vegio gives us. The first adjective he allots his hero is *magnanimus* (3) and in the course of the subsequent lines we find Aeneas *bonus* (327, 440), *pius* (375, 588), as he is, of course, so often styled in Virgil's epic, *magnus* (451), *optimus* (463). He speaks *placido* (23, 328) or *blando* (84) *ore*, or *amico pectore* (376). But such a portrayal does not so much complement as correct what Vegio found at the end of the *Aeneid* where the epic's unforgiving titular hero kills Turnus out of memory of *saevus dolor*, "afflamed by furies and terrifying in anger" (12.946–47 *furiis accensus et ira / terribilis*) and, finally, *fervidus*.

Virgil has his own disquieting form of ring-composition by allotting Aeneas, as he kills his suppliant opponent, much the same vocabulary as that through which he had described the hero's vengeful divine foe, Juno, in the epic's opening lines. Vegio ignores or, better, skirts the interpretative dilemma with which his model directly confronts the reader by deflecting this lexicon away from Aeneas onto others. If we look only at words relating to fury, it is Turnus who is labelled *furens* (196). The implicit *furiae* (340) of war's works are made explicit in Turnus' *rabidus furor* (341–42) which is at once "inflamed by goads lacking justice" (341 *stimulis incensus iniquis*) and "fashioned from hatred" (342 *confectus odiis*). Latinus speaks obliquely of the "license, raging and human" (428 *humana furens ... licentia*) of Turnus, and Aeneas includes Turnus in defending his conduct before Latinus and the Latins as "driven by your furies" (47 *vestris actus furiis*), not by his own, as Virgil would have it.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>The most easily accessible discussion in English of Vegio's work is Kallendorf, esp. 100 and 202 n. 1. For detailed commentary see Brinton and Schneider.

<sup>7</sup>If we trace other words from this concatenation, we find that *dolor* is imputed not to Aeneas but to the Latins (5, 18) and to Daunus (180, 204, 253, 287, 298) as a

The circularities, which I have been tracing, that Virgil suggests to us for the *Aeneid* itself as well as for his total creative accomplishment, are as jarring as they are satisfying, though not in the ways that Homer had taught us to expect or that Vergil, in his later turn, would bring to fruition. Gratification for the reader comes in part from contemplating the very disharmonies, the paradoxically incomplete wholeness and unbalanced complementarities, that Virgil offers for our contemplation. The ending of the *Aeneid* appeals to our postmodern sensibility, among other reasons, for the very fact that we are left in the air with so much unfinished business by comparison to Homer's roundings off. We may, or may not, subscribe to the belief that the civil violence and exile to which Meliboeus is subject win out at the end of the *Aeneid* at the expense of Tityran concinnity. Virgil does in fact leave the reader a variety of interpretative options for accepting or rejecting closure, placing us again in a postmodern predicament. But whichever we choose, such is the way with masterpieces that our present decision may be modified or entirely altered as we absorb and utilize new ways of reading. It is the close study of words that will ever point us on our way. This aspect of our heritage from New Criticism remains, and will remain, of constant value as we implement our *métier* as critics.<sup>8</sup>

The meager pun in my title, "The Loom of Latin," looks in two directions. One confronts the continued responsibility, that falls to our lot as scholars, to further the study of ancient literature, especially of the fine-spun songs that are the Latinist's inexhaustible domain. It is, after all, the interweavings of words that remain constant, after the theoretical probings of the moment have left their mark and been absorbed into tradition. As a New Critic who has attempted to manage the transmigration into a postmodern environment, I find that the baggage that I bring with me remains still the most essential ingredient I possess as I watch our poets change and deepen in meaning. The imaginative use of words sets up for us the novel associations we will discover, and the value and values that we will reconfirm or freshly extract from the literature it forms, because of each new theoretical wave. If we care for words, they will continue to speak to, and for, and through us. We forget them, and their close study, at our peril as the essence of our work.

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result of Turnus' death. Jupiter and the other gods exhibit *ira* (29, 429) because the Trojans broke the sanctity of the treaty. We should note also that *odiis*, which we saw Vergil utilize to describe Turnus' madness, is the last word Virgil allots Turnus (*A.* 12.938) as he pleads with his victorious foe to forego his hatred.

<sup>8</sup>It is my conviction that such a poet as Virgil, whose special force is derived so much from nuances of language, is more at risk of being underappreciated, especially in this moment of "distant" reading, than is Homer, for example.



The other direction posed by my title takes us into a more dimly lit region, the future. Where do we go from here? What looms ahead? I can say one thing with assurance: more of the same. A cursory glance through the tables of content of major classical journals, including the chief organ of this Association, shows an enormous expansion of concern for Latin literature in all its forms over the last half century. Latinists are leading the way in theorizing about genre and allusion, and there is still, and always will be, much work to be done of an intertextual nature, as we further refine our notions of the exchange between writer and writer, and of the intimacy among, say, author, narrator and reader-critic. And particular aspects of metaphoric language will benefit from further exploration. I think of figures such as *ecphrasis* where points of destabilization and difference, between art and literature, for example, or between types of telling, can be most sharply analyzed. Whole reaches of literature, Neronian and Flavian epic, for instance, are only now coming fully into their own as honored areas of investigation. Meanwhile, seemingly every year brings the publication of fresh work that extends our appreciation of preeminent authors like Ovid. Further research into the role of women in Latin letters and into the poets' delineation of gender generally will find much to teach us, as will our more probing knowledge of ancient views of the emotions and of the force of philosophy, especially Hellenistic philosophy, as enriching background for the production of great poetry. The list could go on. There is much to be done, and it is with pride that we project the best of our heritage as philologists into an exciting future rich with potential.

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