

## AENEAS AND MOUNT ATLAS\*

By J. H. W. MORWOOD

In the fourth book of the *Aeneid* Mercury flies to Carthage on the orders of Jupiter to bid Aeneas be mindful of his destiny and sail away. First he binds his winged sandals on his feet; then he takes up his mystical wand, which he uses to make his way through the sky. Next, before he comes to Carthage and sees the glittering figure of Aeneas, he observes and touches down on Mount Atlas, which is arrestingly personified as an old man:

iamque volans apicem et latera ardua cernit  
Atlantis duri caelum qui vertice fulcit,  
Atlantis, cinctum adsidue cui nubibus atris  
piniferum caput et vento pulsatur et imbri,  
nix umeros infusa tegit, tum flumina mento  
praecipitant senis, et glacie riget horrida barba. (4. 246–51)

From here he swoops down to the sea like a bird.

Atlas was a Titan who became a mountain and so the anthropomorphic description, fusing mountain and man, may strike us as entirely appropriate. Yet this episode has aroused much mystification. It is, of course, closely modelled on a passage from the *Odyssey*, the description of Hermes conveying Zeus' instructions to Calypso to allow Odysseus to leave her island (*Od.* 5. 43–54). But, while Virgil's imitation keeps extremely close to Homer for as long as it is an imitation, Atlas is an addition entirely of his own.<sup>1</sup> Altogether absent from Homer's sprightly passage is the massive weight of Virgil's mountain picture—a weight reinforced by the ponderous repetition of the word 'Atlantis' (cf. 7. 586–7). The emphasis that Virgil here places on Mount Atlas can again be seen if we contrast the brevity of his description of Mercury's previous (and direct) flight to Africa in the *Aeneid*, here too on Jupiter's instructions, in Book 1:

volat ille per aëra magnum  
remigio alarum ac Libyae citus astitit oris.  
et iam iussa facit... (1. 300–2)

Certainly Virgil's Book 4 depiction of Mount Atlas, looming harsh and forbidding over the North African landscape, draws attention to itself.

For Kenneth Quinn, it is part of 'a kind of relaxation in the action', 'a bravura passage in the best Hellenistic traditions of pure poetry', a piece of 'virtuoso writing'.<sup>2</sup> To such praise of the passage as a fine excrescence, Dryden magisterially provides an antidote. 'The Action of [a Heroick Poem]', he writes, 'is always one, entire, and great. The least and most trivial Episodes, or under-Actions, which are interwoven in it, are parts either necessary, or convenient to carry on the main Design. Either so necessary, that without them the Poem must be Imperfect, or so convenient, that no others can be imagin'd more suitable to the place in which they are.'<sup>3</sup> Those who feel that Dryden is right in what he says here will regard Quinn's talk of an 'interlude of pure poetry' as a double-edged compliment.

For the most part in fact the attention that the Atlas picture has received has been less than flattering. J. Conington administers a well-mannered rebuke: 'The identification in

\* This article owes important debts to M. S. Warman, E. J. Kenney and I. McAuslan. To them and to my pupils I express my gratitude.

<sup>1</sup> Calypso is the daughter of Atlas; Mercury is his grandson (8. 138–41). V. Pöschl notes, in *Die Dichtkunst Virgils, Bild und Symbol in der Aeneis* (1977), 177, how Virgil has added to the Homeric picture of Hermes who gives and takes away sleep (*Od.* 5. 47–8) the Hermes

who brings death, Hermes Psychopompos. This is certainly a possible significance of Virgil's introduction of Mercury's staff (4. 242–4), but there seems no reason, other than mere proximity, to allow this symbolism to run over into the Atlas picture.

<sup>2</sup> *Latin Explorations* (1963), 39.

<sup>3</sup> *The Poems of John Dryden*, ed. by J. Kingsley (1958), III. 1003.

detail of the mountain and the Titan', he writes, 'perhaps seems a little ungraceful ... the chin and beard strike a modern reader as grotesque.'<sup>4</sup> T. E. Page patronizes with an Olympian assurance: 'The personification of the mountain as an old man ... seems to us overdone ... To assign human characteristics to striking physical objects is common and natural; a lofty mountain may be a giant bearing heaven on his back, but when you begin to point out his eyes, nose, etc., the comparison becomes childish.'<sup>5</sup>

More recently R. G. Austin has stated boldly that the Atlas description is 'out of place here' and 'in its context ... it all sounds a little strange'. Evocatively enough, he refers us for comparison to 'some of the rock-formations on the Cornish coast, or those near Dawlish'.<sup>6</sup> And R. D. Williams refuses to be outpointed in response to landscape. 'Those', he writes, 'who have seen the giant profile of Idris in the changing shadows of Cader Idris will respond to what Virgil is trying to do here.'<sup>7</sup> We need not feel surprised to find that in the thirties the Harvard scholar A. S. Pease referred his readers to Mount Masefield in Vermont.<sup>8</sup> Such points of reference are valuable in that they properly draw our attention to the suggestive power of Virgil's poetry, but the mountaineering activities of classicists fail to provide a very secure foothold for literary criticism.

Other approaches too must be undertaken with considerable caution. For example, the symbolic nature of the description of Atlas has been perceived before now. Viktor Pöschl writes approvingly of Gislason, an Icelandic scholar who referred to 'the contrasting of Atlas with the picture of the splendidly adorned Aeneas that follows (4. 261 ff.)'.<sup>9</sup> But for Pöschl this is not enough. To him the lines symbolize 'the dominion of the dark Fate that is coming towards the lovers. The imposing picture of the tough and suffering giant is as it were a musical motif in which what Mercury is conveying in his message is symbolized. Atlas is a symbol for the cruelty of the Gods and the hardness of Fate.'<sup>10</sup> Pöschl's perception here is illuminating and it has justly won high praise.<sup>11</sup> Even so, his failure to relate what he has to say about Atlas to the totality of the *Aeneid* renders these comments disconcertingly subjective. Is he, in the end, doing much more than expressing the no doubt undeniable fact that, by making the airy Mercury stop on Mount Atlas, Virgil endows his errand with impressive weight? As J. V. Muir well puts it, 'the glimpse of a mountain peak which represents and is a person condemned to a cold and relentless fate has a sobering effect and ensures that Mercury's mission is not placed in a sympathetic context.'<sup>12</sup> If we are going to carry full conviction, then, it is necessary to take the matter further than Pöschl.

This is what P. McGushin did when he began his article, 'Virgil and the Spirit of Endurance', by quoting the Atlas passage in Book 8 of the *Aeneid* (134-42) and drew attention to the constant use of the words *durus*, *moles* (and *molior*) and *labor* in the poem.<sup>13</sup> He related Aeneas to both Atlas and Hercules, and, quoting the Book 4 description, argued that 'Atlas, whose name is but the Greek ἄτλας, 'enduring,' is reinforced here with the Latin equivalent *durus*, to bring out the supreme quality of that endurance which supports the sky and stands firm against the attacks of nature.' Aeneas and his followers embody this spirit of endurance.

Sensitive and cogent as McGushin's analysis is, its wide scope does not allow him to take much account of the context in which the Book 4 Atlas is presented. When this is examined, Aeneas appears for the moment extremely unlike Atlas, as we shall see. McGushin's view of the poem's symbolism is in fact too static. Wagnerian motifs sound differently every time they appear. The theme which Sieglinde sings in ecstatic jubilation on discovering that she carries the noblest hero in the world in her womb concludes *The Ring* on a note of poignant benediction. Virgil's motifs are equally capable of variation.

<sup>4</sup> *Virgil*, ed. by J. Conington (1884), n. at 4. 249.

<sup>5</sup> *The Aeneid of Virgil*, Books I-VI, ed. by T. E. Page (1894), n. at 4. 249.

<sup>6</sup> P. Vergili Maronis, *Aeneidos Liber Quartus*, ed. by R. G. Austin (1973), notes at 248 ff. and 250.

<sup>7</sup> *The Aeneid of Virgil*, Books I-VI, ed. by R. D. Williams (1972), n. at 4. 238 f.

<sup>8</sup> *Aeneid IV*, ed. by A. S. Pease (1967), 256.

<sup>9</sup> Gislason in *Die Naturschilderungen und Naturgleich-*

*nisse in Virgils Äneis* (Diss., Münster, 1937). See Pöschl, op. cit. (n. 1), 176.

<sup>10</sup> Pöschl, op. cit., 176.

<sup>11</sup> From E. J. Kenney, *New Frameworks for Old* (1975), 8-9.

<sup>12</sup> *Virgil: Selections from Aeneid IV, Handbook*, ed. by J. V. Muir (1977), 35.

<sup>13</sup> *AJP* 85 (1964), 225-53. The passages quoted are on pp. 226-7.

Secondly, McGushin is able to devote only scant attention to the tone of the Book 4 Atlas picture, even finding the words Virgil uses 'apparently conventional'. However wrong-headed we may feel the adverse criticisms of this passage to be, we can surely agree that they are sincere responses to a strange picture. The tone here is certainly very different from the genealogical objectivity of the Book 8 lines or the noble assertiveness of 6. 795-7.

It is the intention of this article to define more precisely the nature of the symbolism and the tone employed here by Virgil, and, in so doing, to defend the poet against the strictures of his critics. Then it is hoped that by tracing the development of the theme which Virgil expresses in his Atlas picture we can perceive something important about the progress of Aeneas.

Let us continue therefore by looking at the context in which this description of Mount Atlas is presented. Aeneas and Dido have recently consummated their love; and they are now 'keeping the winter warm' (the expression *hiemem fovere* is a potent one) in their luxurious living:

nunc hiemem inter se *luxu*, quam longa, fovere  
regnorum immemores *turpi*que cupidine captos.  
(4. 193-4)

Of course, this scornful verdict is presented through the distorting medium of the foul goddess Rumour. But enough of the mud sticks for us to wonder to what extent Dido and Aeneas have fallen victim to their private passion and consequently forgotten their public identities and obligations, so clearly established earlier in the poem. Certainly, there can be no doubt concerning the season of the year, and thus these lines set the comfortable self-indulgence of the two leaders against the winter that they are shutting out. Indeed, when Dido and Aeneas take refuge from a storm and make love in a cave, they give us a literal expression of this theme of escape. A traditional Roman, we can be fairly sure, would have regarded Aeneas' love for Dido as a *turpis cupido*. While such an arbiter would certainly have acknowledged the sexual needs of young men, he would have felt strongly that these must not be allowed to interfere with the more important things in life.<sup>14</sup>

The next we hear about Aeneas after Rumour's devastating critique is the analysis from the African king Iarbas who dwells contemptuously on the effeminacy of Aeneas and his men:

et nunc ille Paris cum semiviro comitatu,  
Maeonia mentum mitra crinemque madentem  
subnexus, raptu potitur.  
(4. 215-17)

Iarbas' dismissive reference to Aeneas as the womanish womanizer Paris naturally calls to mind the *Iliad*, a poem in which, as J. Griffin has observed, the theme of Trojan effeminacy is a familiar one.<sup>15</sup> Of course, the charge of Eastern, oriental unmanliness is usually inaccurate when applied to Virgil's Trojans. Indeed, in Book 2, the poet works overtime to rebut the image of Aeneas as a cowardly runaway from his doomed city, and we must surely endorse the hero's emphatic protestation:

Iliaci cineres et flamma extrema meorum,  
testor, in occasu vestro nec tela nec ulla  
vitavisse vices Danaum et, si fata fuissent  
ut caderem, meruisse manu.  
(2. 431-4)

Later, in the eleventh book (282-91), the Greek Diomedes pays high tribute to the prowess of Aeneas in the Trojan War. Yet Virgil repeatedly exploits the theme of Trojan

<sup>14</sup> See R. O. A. M. Lyne, *The Latin Love Poets* (1980), 1-2. See also Cat. 64. 159.

<sup>15</sup> *Homer on Life and Death* (1980), 3-6.

effeminacy.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, so emphatically does he press it home that it becomes almost a matter of necessity for him to enable his hero to reject it. Aeneas must in fact assimilate into his nature the rugged characteristics that Virgil embodies especially in the Italians (see e.g. 9. 603–13).

Repeatedly, Virgil raises the theme of Trojan unmanliness. Repeatedly, not least in the series of *come scoglio* ideas (4. 366–7; 6. 471; 7. 586–90; 9. 674; 10. 693–6; 12. 684–9), he suggests the rock-like strength and enduring toughness that he deems appropriate to a nation which would claim descent from a god of war and whose most famous heroes were suckled by a wolf (1. 275;<sup>17</sup> 8. 630–4). It is through these Italian qualities that Rome, as Jupiter assents to Juno, will become powerful (12. 827). And it is against these qualities that Aeneas must be judged as he keeps the winter warm in Carthage.

It would of course be almost certainly wrong to argue that Virgil thought of Italian manliness as absolutely good while Eastern civilization was inevitably decadent.<sup>18</sup> His patron Maecenas 'was notorious for his luxurious taste ... He was a byword for effeminate fabrics ... , and was teased by Augustus for his interest in jewels';<sup>19</sup> and in the postlude to the *Georgics*, written in Naples, Virgil confesses that

illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat  
Parthenope studiis florentem ignobilis oti... (G. 4. 563–4)

Personally, in fact, Virgil was no enemy to the life of luxury. But if one object of the *Aeneid* was to examine the qualities that were essential to a nation that had to conquer the world before it could impose civilization upon peace (6. 852), the need for tough and enduring rigour, indeed for the traditional Roman qualities; could scarcely be gainsaid.

In his *Memorabilia* (2. 1. 21–34), Xenophon recounts an episode from myth which, no doubt, every Roman schoolboy might be expected to know. This is Prodicus' story of the Choice of Heracles, a hero who, of course, took his turn in supporting the sky like Atlas. Two women appear to him, offering to educate him. One of them, sexily dressed and made up, is called by some Happiness but by others Vice, and she offers to lead Heracles along the primrose path of pleasure. The other, beautiful yet modest and pure and unsurprisingly named Virtue, observes that nothing good or fair can be attained without toil and effort. She points out that the life of pleasure is a self-defeating one on the Shakespearian grounds that 'If all the year were playing holidays, / To sport would be as tedious as to work'; and she holds out the assurance that the most satisfying happiness is to be achieved through the life of toil. Heracles chooses to be schooled by Virtue.<sup>20</sup> We cannot doubt that Aeneas should make the same choice.

We have now considered the way in which the poet presents his hero immediately before Mercury visits Mount Atlas. Let us go on to discuss what happens when Jupiter's

<sup>16</sup> Most notably on the lips of the Trojans' enemies. See e.g. 9. 614–20 and 12. 97–100. Cf. the memorable statement of the motif of oriental glamour in the description of the Phrygian arms of Chloereus, priest of Cybele, in 11. 768–77; though the Romans celebrated the Great Mother, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (2. 19) tells us that the priest and priestess were Phrygians. For a native Roman to join in flute-playing processions or to participate in the Phrygian orgies was forbidden by a law and decree of the Senate. These foreign customs were considered unseemly for Romans. Cf. *A.* 9. 614–20.

<sup>17</sup> I should prefer to take this line as meaning that Romulus rejoiced in being sheltered (literally 'covered') by a wolf rather than to clothe him in the skin of his deceased foster mother, as some would have it: 'gay in a red-brown wolfskin' is W. F. Jackson Knight's version in his Penguin translation of the *Aeneid* (1958). I cannot feel happy with this.

<sup>18</sup> J. Griffin, 'Augustan Poetry and the Life of Lux-

ury', *JRS* 66 (1976), 85–105. Griffin quotes Cicero's statement (*De Off.* 1. 106) of the traditional point of view, more honoured, we may suppose, in the breach than the observance: 'atque etiam si considerare volumus, quae sit in natura excellentia et dignitas, intellegemus, quam sit *turpe* diffluere *luxuria* et delicate. ac molliter vivere quamque honestum parce, continenter, severe, sobrie.'

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 94.

<sup>20</sup> This story may have had wide currency. Ovid assumes awareness of it in *Am.* 3. 1. See further *Aeneid VIII*, ed. by K. W. Gransden (1976), 19–20. In addition, it is significant that, in the Hypsipyle episode in the *Argonautica* (1. 609–913) with its many parallels with the Dido story, it is Heracles who, after refusing to join in the romantic celebrations with the Lemnian women, persuades the Argonauts to leave. There is no glory, he says, in being cooped up for long with foreign women (869–70).

messenger leaves Atlas, flies to the shore of Libya and sees Aeneas. Here again (4. 260–4), as the critics are united in stressing, Virgil emphasizes the gorgeous and sparkling appearance of Aeneas as he helps to create Dido's city. 'The whole picture', writes Austin, 'is dazzling—and oriental';<sup>21</sup> and Gordon Williams refers to 'this un-Roman oriental luxury'.<sup>22</sup> Generations of annotators have reminded us how all the wealth of the sea lies in the word *murice* (262), the Tyrian purple.<sup>23</sup> It is indeed worth noting that Julius Caesar tried—without success—to restrict the wearing of Tyrian clothes.<sup>24</sup>

This picture of Aeneas dressed in clothing made (for him?) by Dido (263–4) renders him an easy victim for such contemptuous hyperbole as that of Iarbas (215–17).<sup>25</sup> Thus the constant parallels which the poet draws between Aeneas and Hercules may, in a context which is highly unsympathetic to the former, cause us to think of the latter dressed in female attire by Omphale, the classic case of a strong man enslaved by a woman.<sup>26</sup> This is surely the retort to be made to those who may claim that it is unfair to accuse Aeneas, as Mercury does in 271, of wasting his time in leisure, since, after all, he is building Carthage. For of course, in constructing Dido's city, he is not simply oblivious of his destiny and his duty; he is, in a manner of speaking, doing Dido's, a woman's, work. Traducing his manly occupation, he can justly be indicted for *otium*.<sup>27</sup> Certainly such a view is in keeping with the word *uxorius*, which comes contemptuously from Mercury's lips (266). No longer *dux* or *pater* but a consort subordinate to a woman, he has forgotten the destiny that calls him from this sweet land (281) over the wintry seas (309–10). Lulled by the sensual pleasures of his life with Dido, he makes holiday (271) while there is serious work to be done.

It would be wrong to suggest that the Roman mission is presented in this book as utterly grim, that the Roman philosophy of life, like that of Ibsen's Rosmers, ennobles but kills happiness. That Augustan joy is at the best of times of a peculiarly self-concealing kind is indicated by the real-life Romans on that great monument to the blessings of the *pax Augusta*, the Ara Pacis: not one of them has a smile on his face. And something in Aeneas very much wants to break loose from his subjection ('*ardet abire*', 281), an *ardor* shared by his men (295, 400, 581). Nevertheless, it is surely significant that the simile Virgil uses elsewhere in the poem to suggest a happily cooperative community, that of bees in a sunlit and flowery countryside (1. 430–6; 6. 707–9)<sup>28</sup> is starkly transformed in the fourth book (401–7) into a description of efficient ants who, effortfully provident, summon up, in part by Virgil's use of military vocabulary, a picture of Fascistic discipline for Dido and for us to behold. It is in this bleak light that we are asked at this moment to view the destiny of Rome.<sup>29</sup>

It seems probable that Virgil's intention here is to distinguish two possible futures for Aeneas, that of the Stoic Roman ant and that of the Sybaritic cicada from Homer's Troy. In the event, Aeneas the Trojan's Roman mission cuts him off from the joys and consolations of a pleasurable life. He has lost his wife and father and, in two identical episodes of immense pathos, when the ghosts of these loved ones appear to him, their

<sup>21</sup> Austin, op. cit. (n. 6), n. at 262.

<sup>22</sup> *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (1968), 385.

<sup>23</sup> Most notably Muir, op. cit. (n. 12), n. at 262.

<sup>24</sup> Suet., *D. Iul.* 43: 'usum...conchyliatae vestis et margaritarum nisi certis personis et aetatibus perque certos dies admit'—quoted by Griffin, art. cit. (n. 18), 92: he also cites (100) Cic., *Att.* 13. 7. 1. to show that Caesar's measure was a failure.

<sup>25</sup> Brooks Otis, *Virgil, A Study in Civilized Poetry* (1963), 82. Cf. Gransden, op. cit. (n. 20), 29.

<sup>26</sup> For the parallelism between Aeneas and Hercules, see McGushin, art. cit. (n. 13), 232–42, and G. Binder, *Aeneas und Augustus* (1971), 61–2, 141–9.

<sup>27</sup> cf. Cat. 51.

<sup>28</sup> For a contrasting view, see J. Griffin, 'The Fourth Georgic, Virgil and Rome', *G & R* 26 (1979), 61–80. Rightly rejecting the idea of the bees' representing 'an absolute model for human society', Griffin cannot accept that Virgil would be advocating a society that is

'impersonal, collective, Stakhanovite, without art' (63). He views the community of bees with jaundiced eyes. But the *Aeneid* similes at any rate surely do not suggest a grimly joyless society. On the contrary. See on the first of them Otis, op. cit. (n. 25), 65: 'the simile suggests all the sweetness of security and happy employment'—while W. R. Johnson (*Darkness Visible* (1976), 93) finds in it an expression of Virgil's 'own best dream, the unity of the City'. Aeneas' jealous exclamation 'O fortunati...' (1. 437) surely confirms an optimistic reading of this bee picture.

<sup>29</sup> F. J. Worstbrock (*Elemente einer Poetik der Aeneis* (1963), 87–9), noting the similarities between the bee simile of Book 1 and the worker ant simile of Book 4, observes the contrast between the observers in each case, Dido and Aeneas respectively: 'Für den funktionalen Kontrast zwischen den beiden Gleichnissen ist von Bedeutung, dass im Bienengleichnis die Atmosphäre des Frühsommers gewahrt ist, im Ameisengleichnis aber bereits der Winter droht.'

forms thrice elude his embrace (2. 792-4; 6. 700-2). He complains that he is not even permitted to hold his mother by the hand (1. 408-9),<sup>30</sup> and, in a passage placed arrestingly at the outset of the seventh book, we discover that yet another link with family life has been severed with the death of his nurse Caieta (7. 1-4; cf. Dido's nurse, 4. 633). Now Jupiter's command forces him to abandon his mistress Dido, turning his back on physical and romantic love, and to sail towards a marriage contracted for dynastic reasons with a girl he has never seen.<sup>31</sup> Jettisoning all personal happiness, Aeneas at times appears an automaton, dedicating himself to his destiny with an ant-like impersonality.

However, as Book 4 of this poem so clearly reveals, Aeneas is no impersonal automaton but a man of flesh and blood. It is by no means easy for him to act as he must: he is profoundly shaken by his great love (395). His affair with Dido shows only too obviously that his personality is not yet ideally adapted to his mission. What sort of qualities then must be developed by the man who has to undergo enormous suffering as he strives to build a better world? The picture of Mount Atlas is designed to answer this question. Mercury is sent by Jupiter to recall to his duty an Aeneas who can with some justification be regarded as a decadent Oriental, the subordinate of a woman (4. 266); yet this is the man who bears the responsibility for the future civilization of the world (4. 231; 6. 851-3). The German scholar G. Binder, though he rather surprisingly relegates the Book 4 picture to a footnote, has observed the link between Atlas who bears the sky on his shoulder (4. 482; 6. 797; 8. 137, 141) with the Aeneas who, in the last line of the eighth book, lifts on to his shoulder the shield made for him by Vulcan and with it the 'famamque et fata nepotum', the glorious destiny of his descendants.<sup>32</sup> And yet, as Mercury flies towards him, Aeneas is almost literally a travesty of the Roman hero, overcome by oriental luxury as well as female charm. Before he reaches him, Mercury stops on Mount Atlas, *durus* Atlas. The word *durus* echoes throughout the poem: in various forms it appears 63 times.<sup>33</sup> Atlas, at once both Titan and mountain, is welded, through Virgil's striking use of anthropomorphism, into a noble symbol of endurance. Unlike the Aeneas who takes refuge in the cave, Atlas withstands the winter and rough weather.<sup>34</sup> Head clad in storm-clouds, buffeted for ever by wind and rain, and mantled in snow and ice, he yet persists in supporting the sky. And the lightness and movement of the bird simile which now follows to convey the fitting Mercury (254-5) lend further emphasis to his steadfast bulk. This most masculine of mountains stands in stark contrast with the 'varium et mutabile semper' that is woman (569); and Atlas' rugged old age ('senis', 251) distances him from the consolations of a young man's life which Aeneas has found with Dido.

I have already quoted from Page's dismissal of this passage his complaint about what he views as the childishness of pointing out the eyes, nose, etc. in a comparison of a mountain to a man. One response to this is to observe that, however childish it may seem, such a way of looking at a mountain was by no means unfamiliar in antiquity. Vitruvius, for example, recounted for Augustus the well-known story of how the architect Deinocrates proposed to Alexander that Mount Athos should be shaped into the statue of a man (2. *pr.* 2, 3).<sup>35</sup> Plutarch, like Strabo, takes the proposed sculpture to be a representation of Alexander himself and, in one of his versions of the anecdote (*Mor.* 335C-E), causes the architect to note that Mount Athos ἔχων ἐαυτῷ σύμμετρα πλάτη καὶ ὕψη καὶ μέλη καὶ ἄρθρα καὶ διαστήματα μορφοειδῆ, δύναται κατεργασθεῖς καὶ σχηματισθεῖς

<sup>30</sup> But see 2. 592-3 and 8. 615.

<sup>31</sup> R. W. Todd, *Vergilius* 26 (1980), 27: 'For Aeneas in the underworld, *Lavinia coniunx* mentioned by Anchises (6. 764) is merely a vehicle which will enable the Trojans to establish in Italy the dynasty specified by destiny.'

<sup>32</sup> *op. cit.* (n. 26), 62. The footnote on 4. 246-9 is on p. 60. Gransden, who does refer to the Book 4 Atlas, writes well on this (*op. cit.* (n. 20), 17-18).

<sup>33</sup> *A Vergil Concordance*, compiled by H. H. Warwick (1975). See also Gransden, *op. cit.*, 39, and Binder (*op. cit.* (n. 26), 61): 'Atlas ist eine Gestalt des ewigen *labor* und gehört als solche zusammen mit drei anderen Gestalten der Aeneis: mit Hercules, Aeneas und Augustus.'

<sup>34</sup> See Otis, *op. cit.* (n. 25), 276-7: referring to Juno's use of Allecto in Book 7 to provoke the Latin War, Otis remarks that '... this is the real test of his *pietas* (and indeed of his other great qualities as well) precisely because his problem here is not to escape or withdraw (as in 2, 4) but to endure, to depend on his own strength and fortitude'.

<sup>35</sup> Strabo 14. 1. 23, Plut., *Alex.* 72. 5-8. See also Schol. *Il.* 14. 229. Cf. R. Jebb on the transformed Niobe (Sophocles, *Antigone* (1971), n. at 831) and E. A. Hahn in her spirited note ('Vergil's Divine Beings', *TAPA* 88 (1957), 64-5).

εἰκῶν Ἀλεξάνδρου καλεῖσθαι καὶ εἶναι. . . The Roman world, for which Alexander remained a model of military achievement,<sup>36</sup> would have found nothing surprising about the concept of the Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota, U.S.A. This huge sculpture in the granite mountain side consists of the heads of Presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt, representing respectively the nation's founding, political philosophy, preservation, and expansion and conservation.

Another riposte to Page's critique is, of course, to remind the reader that Virgil does not refer to Atlas' eyes or nose as Page says he does, but to his chin (*mento*, 4. 250) and beard (251). There is a considerable difference. *Mentum* is in point of fact a most aptly chosen word. Used in an architectural context by Vitruvius of the projecting part of a cornice which casts off the rain (4. 3. 6, L-S 2), it fuses the human and natural in an anthropomorphic equilibrium. The waters tumble down a jutting edge of rock on the side of the mountain and freeze to form a pendent beard of ice.

Furthermore, the jutting chin is given the connotation of bulldog determination by Aristotle in his *Physiogn.* (812b. 24)<sup>37</sup> and thus there may well be a physiognomical significance in this feature of Virgil's doggedly enduring old man. Additional though related associations cluster round the words 'riget horrida barba' (251). For his exemplar of the old Roman values to lecture the decadent Clodia of the *Pro Caelio*, Cicero summons up from the dead Appius Claudius Caecus, one 'ex barbatis illis, non hac barbula qua ista [i.e. Clodia] delectatur sed illa horrida quam in status antiquis atque imaginibus videmus' (33). And in his *Pro Sestio* he contrasts Gabinius, 'unguentis affluens calamistrata coma' (18: cf. the Aeneas depicted in 4. 216 and 12. 99-100), with Piso, apparently 'unum aliquem... ex barbatis illis, exemplum imperii veteris, imaginem antiquitatis, columnen reipublicae' (19). With his 'capillo horrido' (cf. *A.* 4. 249), Piso looked to Cicero as just the man to put the perfume-sellers and hairdressers of Capua out of business. A beard was the badge of a Stoic philosopher (see e.g. Hor., *Sat.* 2. 3. 17 and 35, and Juv. 14. 12), while in *rigidus* Virgil used an adjective ideally adapted to the Romans of the old school (see e.g. Hor., *Ep.* 1. 1. 17, Tac., *Ann.* 16. 22, and Mart. 10. 19. 21). Thus the personification of Atlas as a bearded *senex* may not be, as Page thought it, childish haphazard. It could represent him as the very type of the austere and uncompromising traditional values, a stark, spiky embodiment of old Rome.

The Atlas picture has been the target of further adverse criticism on the ground that Virgil should have made up his mind whether he was describing a mountain or a man.<sup>38</sup> Yet this sort of 'indecision' or fusion is completely characteristic of Virgil's method.<sup>39</sup> The personification of Atlas is surely an attempt—a totally successful one—to convey the idea of a man with qualities of endurance that go beyond the merely human. The passage has been criticized in addition for ungainliness of style;<sup>40</sup> but the effect of gritty staunchness that Virgil is aiming at would be ill served by the neat elegance of, for example, Ovid's schematic account of Atlas' transformation (*Met.* 4. 657-62). The easy grace of this description would be altogether inappropriate as Virgil sets the wind-beaten head, prominent chin and frozen beard of Atlas against the Maenonian bonnet tied round the chin and perfume-drenched hair of Aeneas as Iarbas describes him (249-51, 216-17).

In Mount Atlas therefore Virgil has found a fitting symbol for the Roman qualities at present conspicuously absent and thus all the more urgently necessary in the man who must again shoulder the destiny of Rome and the future of the world, who must discover within himself seemingly limitless resources of toughness, who must abandon both the sweet land and his great love for Dido, subordinating everything to his mission.

<sup>36</sup> S. Walker and A. Burnett, *The Image of Augustus* (1981), 3.

<sup>37</sup> οἱ δὲ ἀκρογένηοι εὐψυχοὶ ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τοὺς κύνες. If this does not refer to the Churchillian courage indicated by the prominent chin but, as W. S. Hett takes it in his translation (Loeb, 1936), to the stout-heartedness of those 'with hair on the point of the chin', it is still relevant to our passage since Virgil's Atlas is bearded.

<sup>38</sup> N. Georgii, *Die Antike Äneiskritik im Komm. d. Tib. Cl. Donatus* (1893), 19.

<sup>39</sup> See Kenney's contribution to D. West and T. Woodman, *Creative Imitation and Latin Literature* (1979), 118.

<sup>40</sup> Austin, op. cit. (n. 6), n. at 248 ff.; *The Aeneid*, ed. by J. W. Mackail (1930), 142.

If this interpretation is correct, we may expect to see Aeneas subsequently developing some of the qualities that we have observed in the mountain. We are not disappointed. After the visit of Mercury he shows inexorable resolve and Dido now finds in him the hardness of the jagged rocks of the Caucasus (as alliteration and assonance brutally stress: 4. 366–7). Then, in 4. 441–6, there is the famous simile which likens Aeneas, immovable at the pleas of Dido's sister, to an oak tree in the Alps, smitten by north winds but standing firm. Coming so soon after the Atlas description, these references to two other immense mountain ranges in unequivocally psychological contexts may seem to endorse the view suggested here. And possibly the description of manly sports in the following book is intended to contrast with the fourth book's exposition of decadence.

But perhaps all this is not quite enough. It may reasonably be felt that, if what has been propounded comes near to the truth, we can expect to find towards the *end* of the poem a powerful image by which Virgil will show whether Aeneas has finally taken within himself the qualities we have admired in Atlas, and which we felt were necessary for the establishment of the destiny of Rome. We are not cheated of this expectation. At a key moment in the twelfth book, as Virgil launches into the climax of the whole work, Aeneas advances on Turnus for the duel whose outcome is to establish the future of Rome. As he moves forward, he is likened in size to Mount Athos, the very mountain proposed to Alexander the Great as a potential statue, then to Mount Eryx, and finally to the main Italian range, the Apennines:

quantus Athos aut quantus Eryx aut ipse coruscis  
cum fremit ilicibus quantus gaudetque nivali  
vertice se attollens pater Appenninus ad auras. (12. 701–3)

The clear relationship between the personification of the mountain here and in the Atlas picture has been noted before now.<sup>41</sup> It is, of course, unmistakable, with every detail in the Apennine simile finding a correspondence in the Atlas passage (though the idea of the mountain's noise is implied, not stated, in Book 4). Mackail has an illuminating note on the Book 12 simile in which he points out that the description is of 'the Gran Sasso d'Italia, which rising to the height of close on ten thousand feet, is visible from both Adriatic and Tyrrhene seas, and keeps its snow at the top beyond midsummer; and further that, seen from the south, its helmet-shaped peak gives the effect of a giant warrior striding along the mountain ridge'.<sup>42</sup> Mackail thus not only stresses the likeness of 'pater Appenninus' to Aeneas himself at this particular moment of the poem but also underlines its importance as the central feature of Italian geography. Atlas and the Apennines dominate any map of the Western Mediterranean.<sup>43</sup> By working these vast ranges into the texture of his poem, Virgil suggests the cosmic nature of the issues involved. The future of the whole world rests on one man.

Atlas in Book 4, it has been argued, represented in its toughness qualities in which at that time Aeneas was manifestly deficient. He was in fact altogether *unlike* Atlas, and thus an Atlas *simile* was completely out of the question—which may indeed be why Virgil made use of symbolism rather than a more overt means of conveying his message. Now in the twelfth book Aeneas is imbued with the stamina that Virgil associates especially with the Italians. And so it is a proper recognition of the stiffening of his sinews that he can now be likened to a great mountain so clearly evocative of Atlas. But Atlas itself would no longer be appropriate. However resonant with the qualities of antique Rome it proved to be, these were communicated through suggestion rather than statement: Atlas, after all, is in the wrong continent. What must now be explicitly conveyed is the image of a man who is using his newly-won Italian *virtus* to lay the foundation for an Italian future. For this purpose, what mountain could be more suitable than Appenninus, the backbone of Italy, as much *pater* to the Italians as Aeneas to his men?

<sup>41</sup> *Aeneid XII*, ed. by B. Tilly (1969), n. at 703.

<sup>42</sup> Mackail, *op. cit.* (n. 40), n. at 704.

<sup>43</sup> V. Bérard, *Les Phéniciens et l'Odysée* (1902), 240:

'Les géographes gréco-romains comprennent dans Atlas toute la chaîne côtière de l'Afrique mineur.'



Furthermore, now possessed of the mountain-like qualities necessary for the shouldering of the Roman mission, Aeneas is compared to a mountain that, unlike the weather-beaten Atlas, *rejoices* in its snowy covering. There was nobility in the Atlas picture, but it was the nobility of passive endurance. Indomitable yet joyless, it suggested what was negative and limited in the old Roman ideal as well as what was admirable.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, Appenninus rears its head to the winds with a positive self-assertion that communicates the exhilaration now felt by Aeneas and juxtaposes it with the discord of war ('fremit', 702: cf. 'horrendumque intonat armis', 700). Aeneas' triumph is that he has gone beyond grim persistence, from negative long-suffering to dynamic self-assertion. Now, as he moves against Turnus, he is exhilarated at fulfilling the role given him by destiny. He has embraced his mission with joy. We have come a long way from the Aeneas we first saw in the storm of Book 1, wishing he had died at Troy (1. 94–101). The Apennine simile shows us a man who has sacrificed everything to his mission and now finds in that mission not an imposed duty to be doggedly fulfilled but a fierce elation. Thus Virgil's choice of these mountains goes beyond the fact that Atlas, like Aeneas in Book 4, is in Africa while the Apennine simile is suitable for Aeneas in Italy. For the story of the poem is not simply that of a man establishing himself at a geographical destination. Aeneas has in addition reached his spiritual goal, now possessed of the qualities that made the Roman empire not just a vast area on a map but a state of mind.

It is, of course, entirely characteristic of the underlying pessimism of this poet, of the inevitability with which Virgil modulates from joy to tragedy, that he cannot leave things there. As in Book 6, where the affirmation of the pageant of heroes is overcast with the pathos of the Marcellus postlude (6. 860–86), so here, having brought to a splendid climax his celebration of the Roman character, Virgil will end his poem within 250 lines showing Aeneas' personality in a very different light, as a man possessed by *furor* (12. 946). Yet Aeneas' concluding fall from grace is surely not conclusive. It does not undermine the jubilant optimism of the Apennine simile. Rather it qualifies it, and, in the honesty with which Virgil records the terrible emotions that can overpower his hero in an instant, it validates it. The poet who portrays so bluntly his protagonist's human weakness is surely to be trusted when he tells of his greatness. Aeneas' joy in his mission is not the final picture of the *Aeneid*, for too many serious doubts have been raised about that mission to allow so reassuring an ending. Yet the joy is as real as the frenzy. While the conclusion gives a tragic colouring to Aeneas' triumph, it does not cancel it out.

### *Harrow School*

<sup>44</sup> Plutarch (*Cato Maior* 5) felt that Cato had a mean and rigid nature. He wondered whether to ascribe his inhuman stinginess to greatness of spirit or meanness of mind (5. 6), and he refers to the excessive strictness and

restraint of his life (20. 6). Also, see e.g. Cic., *De Fin.* 4. 78: '...[Stoici] horridiores evadunt, duriores et oratione et moribus.'