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The Popular Poetics and Politics of the *Aeneid*

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What the crowd esteems must of course be esteemed by the learned too.[1]

Vergil's *Aeneid*, the epic of national identity, was produced at a time when in all probability nobody in Italy (including quite possibly the Princeps himself) could have been easily confident of the significance of what history had now brought to pass.[2] This essay accordingly seeks to contemplate the poem as an artifact in dialogue with its immediate audience's practical assumptions and expectations about new political realities in the Res Publica that Augustus so determinedly claimed to be resuscitating. Amid all "the very high level and density of relations and communications that united the Roman civic body in every direction" in the Republic, curiosity about the sentiments of the Populus Romanus still seems neglected.[3] Excited interest in popular feelings was characteristic of many republican *principes* and consequently ever fundamental to political life at all manner of occasions for rhetorics of self-presentation, whether mundane or more extraordinarily charismatic, in the civic spaces of the city. But modern analysts have not always been ready to ponder whether in fact Vergil's artistry succeeded not only in pleasing the community at large but thereby also in communicating aesthetically a regime's legitimacy.[4]

The *Aeneid* quickly commanded great authority in Rome and so ever after served as a suitable icon with which to meditate upon a very grand scheme of things, and thereby to provoke cheer, tears, or some peculiarly alloy of emotional responses to its famously "polysemous" qualities.[5] Its affects,

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[1] *Quod enim probat multitudo, hoc idem doctis probandum est*, Cic. *Brut.* 188; cf. *de Orat.* 3.195, *Off.* 1.147. Reasons for approval might of course be thought uncertain: *Rhet. Her.* 4.3.

[2] Cf. Toll.

[3] Nicolet 388.

[4] Cf. Wiseman 1996.

[5] Johnson 17; P. R. Hardie 1986 has properly underscored the universalist dimension.

moreover, blossomed from a "profoundly contextualized network of association, echoes, imitations, allusions—a rich root system reaching down and entwined with the fibers of the culture in its historical dimension."[6] Yet the fertility of historical culture surely included the attitudes and values of all its inhabitants, even if they are too often disregarded by philologists. Furthermore, when a culture has been shaped by a centuries-old tradition of republicanism, questions about a canonical artifact's audience deserve to be aired—and not least to reassure students (who with reasonable ingenuousness might inquire about what "ordinary Romans" knew or made of this poem) that their curiosity is as healthy as it is difficult to satisfy. And what is more, the grandly universalizing (and yet unrelentingly multivalent) ambitions of the *Aeneid* themselves implicitly seem to acknowledge the truth of the aphorism that the "more emotions we allow to speak...the more different eyes we can put on in order to view a given spectacle, the more complete will be our conceptualization...."[7]

Here I shall prefer adumbration of sociopolitical realities over more spiritual idealities in order to argue that, if the *Aeneid* was (in whole or in part) "legible" to the Populus, then it was capable of eliciting the judgment of the Populus upon a vision of national leadership that was compelling but still imperfect in its explanation of itself. This poem helped not only to cast Augustus' seemingly inevitable power as heroic but also to make that heroic power comprehensible in the contemporary idioms of political communication in a Res Publica. I shall initially stress that public performance of poetry enabled its dissemination to audiences that did not necessarily possess a wealth of intertextual knowledge acquired from libraries and the mellifluous lips of slaves. Consequently, key ideological aspects of a widely disseminated text had the potential to resonate with the experiences and imaginations of humbler members of the Populus.

To be fair, the absence of the rubric "audience" from the index of contents of most important books about the *Aeneid* is perhaps the consequence of the general dearth of information about the tastes and ideological dispositions of the Populus Romanus rather than of any explicit lack of interest. There is, however, evidence enough to suggest that "knowledge of Virgil, or love for

[6]Conte 49.

[7]Nietzsche 255. Hexter has well suggested how the text encourages readers to "project their desires" (122) into its interpretation.

him, was not the exclusive privilege of an educational elite."[8] Horsfall has most helpfully surveyed how knowledge of Vergil extended into a world beyond libraries. In notices of conversation, in graffiti (from Pompeii and elsewhere), inscriptions, wall-paintings and mosaics, and upon sarcophagi and other artifacts there are testimonies that show "how a Roman of but very modest education could partially but still passionately enjoy his Virgil."[9] As Austin (so humanely) remarked of a gravestone commemorating a life lost by a twelve-year-old slave apprentice by echoing *Aeneid* 2.558, which monumentalizes the death of Priam: "old king and young slave, made equal in the dust, with Virgil linking them."[10]

In general, there was always something of egalitarian access to literature at Rome through crowding into public performances in theaters and elsewhere rather than select libraries. It is indeed "hard to overestimate the impact of theatrical performances in the Graeco-Roman world."[11] The *aretalogoi* who performed at Augustus' dinner parties remind us of the difficulty of making a clear distinction between drama and story-telling.[12] They were, moreover, heirs to a tradition of performance of poetry stretching back to Homeric bards, which routinely brought poetry into the more public venues of a city as well as into big houses. Aulus Gellius mentions (18.5.2–4) that in the middle of the second century C.E. epic was publicly performed in a theater at Puteoli; it may be presumed that oral delivery had earlier been customary in such a location. Strabo indeed remarks (1.2.8) that poetry was able in his day to fill theaters and was of more use to the people than philosophy. Some poetic performers of our period are remembered as famous, and epic performances in particular could

[8]Horsfall 251–52; see also the important article of Quinn.

[9]Horsfall 252; details of the testimonies at 252–55.

[10]*Carm. Epig.* 403; Austin *ad loc.*

[11]Wiseman 1995: 131. MacMullen has argued that whatever allowance is made for different people attending at different times, "exposure to the theater was quite minute" and compares theater to modern opera (421). Although the demographic specifics for attendance at the *ludi* are indeed as inscrutable as details of the composition of the citizenry at the *contiones* and *comitia*, this position is extreme: however exciting opera might be to its aficionados, it does not intentionally or self-consciously implicate itself in its followers' reading of contemporary political affairs. Moreover, MacMullen allows for repeated performances but focuses his argument upon élite control and taste, playing down the popular demand for access. On *instaurationes* (albeit in the Middle Republic) Taylor fundamentally recognizes that popular demand might influence the number of repeat performances. Cèbe reasonably (if rather vaguely) compares the audience of Plautus with that of Aristophanes.

[12]Suet. *Aug.* 74; cf. Wiseman 1989.

draw sizeable crowds.[13] Vergil himself was reputedly a delightful reciter.[14] His *suavitas* would not perhaps be easily enjoyed by a crowd of thousands, but his skills as a public performer of his own poetry were nonetheless duly described in terms appropriate to an assessment of dramatic performance,[15] and an anecdote in Servius (ad *Ecl.* 6.11) speaks to Vergil's dramatic success as a recitative performer. The information is unreliable but not entirely useless, in that it bespeaks the similarities in performability between dramatic and what is often categorized as non-dramatic poetry. While the only direct attestation to performance of parts of the *Aeneid* suggests an extremely select audience,[16] some of the *Eclogues* were certainly incorporated into the performative repertoire of the stage, including mimes, which flourished as popular entertainment at this time.[17]

It was perhaps when verses of the *Eclogues* were performed that we should envisage Vergil, in the terms of an anecdote in Tacitus' *Dialogus* (13.1–3), as the man of a politicized moment at the centre of popular attention in the Roman theatre. The character of Maternus counters Aper's insistence upon the primacy of oratory over poetry as a means of winning power and lasting fame by claiming that the pursuit of poetry is a pleasure in itself, harms no man, and offers greater tranquillity whilst yet providing influence and fame. The illustrative example concerns Vergil:

> ac ne fortunam quidem vatum et illud felix contubernium comparare timuerim cum inquieta et anxia oratorum vita. licet illos certamina et pericula sua ad consulatus evexerint, malo securum et quietum Vergilii

[13]Statius' father was a famous poetic performer in Naples and had won prizes in his youth (Stat. *Sil.* 5.3.133–37); he was probably born in C.E. 25 (A. Hardie 6 and 13–14). Q. Vargunteius is said to have "performed" (*pronuntiabat*) Ennius' *Annales* on appointed days to a large crowd (*in magna frequentia*): Suet. *Gram.* 2.2; for other references to *pronuntiabat* see Kaster 66.

[14]Serv. *A.* 4.323; *Vit. Verg.* 95–96.

[15]*Vit. Verg.* 97–98.

[16]It is said by Donatus/Suetonius that Vergil (with help from Maecenas) read the *Georgics* to Octavian at Atella upon his return from Actium over a period of four days; some years later, Books 2, 4, and 6 of the *Aeneid* were read to Augustus and his family (*Vit. Verg.* 91–95, 108–12). Critical reaction from a wider audience was also solicited (*ibid.* 112–14). Octavia apparently was severely affected by 6.883.

[17]On mime's continued prosperity at the *ludi* see Plin. *Ep.* 9.34. Poetry did not, however, even need to be recited publicly and directly to reach a wider, popular audience, since, as Quinn has claimed (152), even refined Alexandrianist verses stood every likelihood of becoming assimilated into dramatic performance and being turned into "some kind of stage-spectacular." All Augustan poets were heavily influenced by drama: see, above all, Griffin ch. 5.

> secessum, in quo tamen neque apud divum Augustum gratia caruit neque apud populum Romanum notitia. testes Augusti epistulae, testis ipse populus, qui auditis in theatro Vergilii versibus surrexit universus et forte praesentem spectantemque Vergilium veneratus est sic quasi Augustum.

Although there is no certainty that this incident ever happened, the anecdote offers a good reminder that some excerpts of Vergilian verse could be made accessible to an audience simply through performance. Vergil's celebrity is further instructive in itself. Not only might a poet too readily imagined as bookishly retiring attend the theater, but the presumed plausibility of the description of his reception, besides suggesting that a close association could be made between poetry and its poet,[18] underscores the important dynamic between the politically prominent and the Populus that was ritually played out in the civic spaces of the city. The comparison of Vergil's veneration to that customarily offered to Augustus does reveal how the Populus was remembered as able authoritatively to bestow prestige and validation upon figures present in such locales.

Any such splendid reception was an important prize in Roman politics, since much of the meaning of the Res Publica resided in articulations and celebrations of an imagined community.[19] Under the Principate such expression of honor was as valuable as control of more instrumental assets of power, for example monies or armies.[20] In the generation before Vergil's and Augustus' pre-eminence such unanimity was rather harder to come by, as the evidence of Cicero makes clear. In 59 Cicero informs Atticus of the popular reception of the triumvirs.[21] When away from Rome he pined for similar news of the behavior of theatrical audiences; M. Caelius Rufus was naturally happy to be able to supply

[18]Vitruvius in calling attention (9 praef. 16) to the adulation accorded famous and canonical poetic dramatists of the past, particularly Accius and Ennius, extends his own appreciation not merely to the *sententiae* of the writers he admires but also to their *figurae*.

[19]See further Bell 18.

[20]Upon which Yavetz is fundamental. For the striking *veneratus est* cf. Tib. 1.5, 35 (honor accorded Messalla), Plin. *Pan.* 54, Suet. *Cl.* 12, Tac. *Ann.* 16.4; Gudeman ad *Dial.* 13.3. The stress upon the proper name highlights the fact that it is a private citizen to whom the ovation is granted: *Vergilii...Vergilium* carefully inserted within the frame encompassed by *Augusti...Augustum* when a pronoun would easily have served. Gudeman (*ibid.*) offers other instances of repetition of a proper name in Tacitus: *Hist.* 5.21; *Ann.* 1.13, 2.28, 3.30 and 41, 4.29 and 31, 6.15 and 39, 12.64.

[21]*Att.* 2.19.3.

details of the discomfiture of Hortensius in Curio's theater.[22] In April 44, in the aftermath of Caesar's murder, he urged Atticus to send information about the standings of the politically prominent: "If you have any news of practical consequence, let me have it in your reply; if not, tell me all about the demonstrations in the theatre and the actor's jests."[23] These signs articulated popular opinion, which in a Res Publica carried enormous weight. In three places, acknowledged Cicero, the sentiment of the Populus was directly articulated: the Contio, the Comitia, and the crowd at the plays and the gladiators.[24] As spectators, anonymous citizens had some significance as political players.

Augustus, being generous in the provision and originality of a great diversity of spectacles, regularly appeared before the people at ludic occasions.[25] He was always careful to be seen presiding over what he had orchestrated for the entertainment or edification of his subjects, or else to explain his absence and appoint presidents in his stead.[26] When present in a theater he (unlike his adoptive father) always gave his entire attention to the proceedings. Physical preeminence in the *circus* was prized by the *principes* of the Republic and, like other ceremonial distinction, systematically monopolized by the Princeps. Augustus' successors followed his precedent and performed similar spectacular duties (although with varying degrees of success), ideally managing to enjoy a pre-eminent elevation and yet also to acknowledge the dignity of the audience of citizens.[27]

[22]*Fam.* 8.2.1. Hortensius' skills of obtaining applause drew heavily upon theatrical technique: Gell. 1. 5.3; note too Val. Max. 8.10.2.

[23]*Att.* 14.3.2 (Shackleton Bailey's translation). Atticus had written of a demonstration in favor of Caesar's assassins at a theater in April 44 (*Att.* 14. 2.1).

[24]*Sest.* 106. There is a lengthy treatment of theatrical allusion to contemporary politics at 115–26; in general, Nicolet 361–73.

[25]He gave *ludi* in his own name four times and paid twenty-three times for magistrates lacking sufficient funds to give them; he gave games in the Forum, the amphitheater, the Circus, and the Saepta; in the Circus there was charioteering, racing, and the killing of wild animals, with the men taking part drawn *ex nobilissima iuventute*; if anything *invisitatum dignumque cognitu* was brought to Rome, he gave special exhibitions of it: a rhinoceros was shown in the Saepta, a tiger in the *scaena*, and a snake fifty cubits in length in front of the Comitium: Suet. *Aug.* 43.4.

[26]Suet. *Aug.* 45: he was usually upon his *pulvinar*, unless *ex amicorum fere libertorumque cenaculis spectabat*, whence doubtless a fine view was still to be enjoyed by the crowd.

[27]Thus from on high Claudius hailed the audience as *domini* (Suet. *Cl.* 21.5). *Comitas* was a prevalent ideology at the games: Tac. *Ann.* 1.76; Suet. *Tit.* 8.2.; in general, Wallace-Hadrill 1982.

Consequently it is striking that the only moment in the *Aeneid* when one gains a sense of an entire community of Trojans "est précisément, pour une large part, un moment de fête, de jeux, de spectacle."[28] In the narrative of the games of Book 5 attention is called to how Aeneas cuts a pre-eminent figure before the audience of both native Sicilians and his Trojans, presiding elevated above them all.[29] He, as the *pater optimus* (358), also determines the rules of the contests.[30] Moreover, it is specifically to a theater that, once the sea-race has finished, the hero leads an epic crowd of thousands for the athletic contests (5.287–92):

> hoc pius Aeneas misso certamine tendit
> gramineum in campum, quem collibus undique curvis
> cingebant silvae, mediaque in valle theatri
> circus erat; quo se multis cum milibus heros
> consessu medium tulit exstructoque resedit.

In thus calling attention to the presence of an audience at the games within the text, Vergil departs revealingly from how his Homeric model signals the presence of spectators.[31] There is no such emphasis upon the spectators at the games of *Iliad* 23, where the competitors have an audience exclusively of fellow warriors, nor at the games of *Odyssey* 8, where attention is focused upon the competitors rather than upon the large crowd of Phaeacians. In the *Aeneid*, the narrative of the games indeed shows the epic's concern with the legitimacy of the political leadership put on view before the crowd.[32]

[28]Pomathios 126.

[29]*A.* 5.43–44: *socios in coetum litore ab omni / advocat Aeneas tumulique ex aggere fatur*; see also 75–76: *ille e concilio multis cum milibus ibat / ad tumulum magna medius comitante caterva*. Other moments of lofty leadership in the epic: 4.554–55; 8.115–16; 10.260–62.

[30]*A.* 5.130: *constituit signum nautis pater* for contestants who are already Roman citizens (*cives*, 196); and of course he gives out the prizes, extemporizing the justice of the deserving; for Vergil's remodelling of Homer on prize-giving see Willis. Whereas in the *Iliad* (23.543–62) Antilochus protests vehemently against a decision of Achilles, the dispute in the *Aeneid*, transferred to Nisus and the foot-race, is directed at another competitor and not the presiding hero; cf. Sauvage 218.

[31]Heinze 161. On other narrative differences between Homer and Vergil in treating the games see Otis 41–61. Games in later Latin epic, particularly Statius' *Thebaid* 6 and Silius' *Punica* 16, took the *Aeneid* as their main model, "into which they interpolated material from other sources which one would have thought it more natural for them to follow" (Willis 417).

[32]Feldherr analyzes the ship-race in particular in order cleverly to identify the "complex and multi-leveled allegory reinforcing the political and natural hierarchies that define the Roman universe" (251).

Clearly, in Vergil's representation of a type of political pre-eminence as in so many other aspects of the *Aeneid*, the heroic and contemporary worlds easily coincide.[33] Moreover, each of those who encountered this episode may well have been able to find "an image of himself within the text" as a ludic or circus spectator and, perhaps too, a citizen of the Res Publica being restored by Augustus.[34] He would have had little difficulty in understanding the similarities in the roles performed by Aeneas and Augustus, the two heroic leaders positioned at the opposite poles of the fated trajectory of the national history. In all likelihood, moreover, the correspondences between heroic ideal and contemporary reality could easily induce members of Vergil's audience to flesh out formal parallels with imagined resemblances of person. For, although the nature of the correspondences between Aeneas and Augustus has been variously understood,[35] there should be little doubt that, since all members of the Populus had plenty of opportunities to see their national leader in person (albeit customarily in a somewhat elevated position), they might happily use Augustus' civic presence to quicken the figure of Aeneas in their imaginations.[36]

While Rome was no "face-to-face" society, all Romans of grand civic stature were readily recognizable.[37] From an early age Augustus had been very visible, whether he was to be seen surrounded by a schoolboy entourage or following Caesar's triumphator's chariot.[38] In time, when his visibility had become thoroughly a matter of routine, Augustus' person could be scrutinized by the *populus universus*. Fortunately he would be well pleased by his looks: dermatological blemishes were, according to Suetonius (*Aug.* 79–80), confined to his body rather than his face and could be covered by his trusty homespun toga. He was also fortunate in having an asset of which to be proud in his eyes,

[33]On further aspects of the *Aeneid*'s systematic fusion of past and present see Sandbach.

[34]Feldherr 257.

[35]Drew presumed the existence of a systematic pattern of allegory; Binder has best documented the parallels whilst being careful to stress their allusive suggestiveness rather than an exact correspondence.

[36]Aeneas cannot be dressed in a toga but his *amictus* nicely substitutes as the only garment "with which Vergil can visually fuse" the epic and contemporary worlds: so Bender 151.

[37]The sea-captain, for instance, who transported Pompey after the rout at Pharsalus was not an acquaintance of the great man but of course had seen him (and quite possibly in the theater): Plut. *Pomp.* 73.

[38]Nicolaos: *FGH* 90 F 127.5 and 127.17–18.

the supreme medium of proxemic communication: in an emperor's eyes there could be perceived the coincidence of physicality, character, and power.[39]

Vergil gives Aeneas both the presence and the unforgettable eyes of Augustus.[40] He rather studiously employs no epithets of personal description but only those of heroic and moral Roman leadership, so making his proto-Roman appear somewhat cold and lifeless:[41] "Aeneas' presence, his words and actions, are more persuasive and constantly determinant of the outcome and nature of the poem than those of any hero of the *Iliad*....Yet he remains curiously faceless and indistinct."[42] The portrayal of Aeneas is allusively built from many models; his audience must supply its own *hypocrisis*. Readers and listeners could be reminded of, among others, Odysseus, Paris, Menelaus, Achilles, Hector, Agamemnon, Hippolytus; surely too, figures from Roman drama and history came vividly to mind—and, of course, most obviously but never explicitly, the idealised image of Augustus himself.[43] If then a face is to be imagined for Aeneas, it is one statuesquely radiating his divinity and power. Thus, for instance, when the mist parts at the court of Dido (1.588–93), the hero is magnificently visible in a bright light:

> restitit Aeneas claraque in luce refulsit
> os umerosque deo similis; namque ipsa decoram
> caesariem nato genetrix lumenque iuventae
> purpureum et laetos oculis adflarat honores:
> quale manus addunt ebori decus, aut ubi flavo
> argentum Pariusve lapis circumdatur auro.

[39]Suet. *Aug.* 79.2: *oculos habuit claros ac nitidos, quibus etiam existimari volebat inesse quiddam divini vigoris, gaudebatque, si qui sibi acrius contuenti quasi ad fulgorem solis vultum summitteret. Vultus* in general—and especially the eyes—demanded hermeneutic scrutiny in Roman thought and political practice: Pliny the Elder paid great attention (*Nat.* 11.141–45) to the eyes of emperors; cf. 11.138, 185, 200. Suetonius attempts to indicate the virtuous or vicious nature of the various emperors, following in the same tradition of physiognomic discourse: Evans *passim*. Tacitus, it might well be noted, captures the ugliness of his subjects' characters with descriptions of their outward ugliness; Tiberius' person is described with great malignity (e.g., *Ann.* 4.57).

[40]As well pointed out by Drew (1927: 77–78).

[41]The colorlessness of Aeneas may even be an established part of the literary tradition that before Vergil presented Aeneas as a "rather flat character"—so Galinsky 1981: 1007.

[42]Griffith 314.

[43]The delicacy of the analogy is, for instance, well revealed in Vergil's use of the word *princeps*, which after 27 B.C.E. gained a specific connotation. It is not used directly of Aeneas although it does occur in the *Aeneid* (3.168, 5.160, 9.535, 10.166, 254, 11.620) and nowhere in the *Eclogues* or *Georgics*.

Already in this first book the epic's audience has encountered Aeneas braving shipwreck, heroically quelling the fears of those who follow him (195–209); and impressions of the hero are themselves heir to the spectacle of legitimate, imperious divinity checking an outbreak of wanton, cosmic chaos (124–156). Neptune's restoration of order receives the first simile of the poem, in which the rebellion of the *ignobile volgus* (149) is suppressed by the authority of the anonymous man of pre-eminence: *tum pietate gravem ac meritis si forte virum quem / conspexere...* (150–51). As Pöschl so well saw, this image is programmatic for the principal themes of Vergil's meditations upon powerful authority in universes both cosmic and politic.[44] Such poetics, moreover, are clearly a distillation of Vergil's readings in literature that allocated unforgettability to deserving individuals. Ideological skeins are drawn from narratives of cultural fame, heroization, and divinity, and are worked together in order to present a monument of authority and power, timelessly inspecific in everything except its comprehensiveness as an idealization of an individual of proven virtue, charismatic presence, and efficacious rhetoric, which together all naturally command an audience's gaze and deference.

That audience was well familiar with the stylized imagery of the powerful. Significantly, whoever had walked about the city had habitually noticed an extraordinary abundance of statues.[45] After Alexander the Great, portraiture of the powerful had developed throughout the Greco-Roman world as a "discourse about overwhelming charismatic power" that fixes for whole societies an understanding of how heroic individualists of kingly significance are to be imagined and remembered.[46] In the Res Publica, kingly significance had been evolving slowly and had been circumscribed by larger traditions of popular politics: the Populus might contribute money for a statue (commemorating, for example, Cato the Elder, for his restoration of the state as censor),[47] or might band together to remove the monuments of the hated—just as statues of Verres in a Greek city had been thrown down *per vim et per universam multitudinem*, so too at Rome Sulla and Pompey were likewise attacked.[48] And such men not only had significance and memorability in the discourse of monumentalization

[44]Pöschl 19–23.

[45]Zanker *passim*; Lahusen (who puts too much weight upon senatorial control of public statuary).

[46]Stewart 60.

[47]Plut. *Cato Ma.* 19.3.

[48]Cic. *Verr.* 2.2.158; Suet. *Jul.* 75.4. Caesar's restoration of the statue of Pompeius was intended to be a monument to himself and his own magnanimity (Plut. *Caes.* 57; cf. *Cic.* 40).

but were also, of course, able to be closely identified with their portraiture because it aimed, idealization notwithstanding, to make personality readily identifiable. Artists sought to capture something specifically suggestive of the man himself:[49] painters paid relatively little attention to the body as a whole but particular attention to the eyes, wherein character was to be apprehended;[50] and manufacture of eyes for statues was a business for skilled specialists.[51] All Romans knew and understood very well the powerful, ever-present figure of Augustus.[52]

Insofar as aspects of such an historical "regime of truth" are, like the political pre-eminence of the ludic impresario, incorporated into the *Aeneid* as surely as is a multiplicity of literary allusions, the epic has elements readily legible even to those Romans more familiar with statues than with Greek texts, or with a theater than a library; and it might also be stressed that (*pace* Bakhtinian schematisms) in many areas of Roman collective life there is no distinct demarcation to be made between plebs and *literati* in habits of cultural consumption, although that is not to say that *ludi*, statues, or gladiators (to move now to my next illustration of historical practices refracted into the epic text) elicited the same sorts of reaction from all the subjectivities in their audiences.

Descriptions of battle throughout the *Aeneid* seem even to modern readers to be somewhat gladiatorial in flavor.[53] The presence of spectators of the fighting, moreover, is sometimes stressed.[54] When, at the very end of the poem,

[49]Plutarch believed (*Sull.* 2.1) that an impression of Sulla's physical appearance could be gained from his statues.

[50]*Alex.* 1.

[51]E.g., Treggiari 62.

[52]Recent criticism has stressed the involvement of viewers in reading Augustan monuments such as the Ara Pacis: e.g., esp. Galinsky 1996: 149.

[53]E.g., the despatch of Mezentius: Harrison 283. Gladiatorial associations are perhaps fused with allusion to single combat in general: Aeneas the hero represents for the contemporary audience a long tradition of prestigious one-on-one combat celebrated in national memories (on which see further Oakley). M. Valerius Corvus famously (Quadrigarius F 12 Peter) and Livy 7.26.1–10) defeated a Gallic champion in single combat through the assistance of a raven that pecked the face of the opponent; in the *Aeneid* (12.865–68) the Dira descends to molest Turnus, whose commitment to certain defeat has powerful (and sympathetic) echoes of *devotio*. The reports (Plut. *Ant.* 62 and 75) of Antonius' challenges to Octavian to fight man-to-man are very interesting: if true they perhaps were intended for the consumption of both soldiers and a general public; if groundless, they nevertheless bespeak an historical mentality that Plutarch found plausible.

[54]E.g., at 10.444 the Rutulian *socii* of Turnus retreat at his command to allow a *monomachia*; Pallas prays to Hercules (459–72) but receives only a sorrowful explication of

Aeneas kills Turnus, it is reasonable to suspect that amid all the density of allusion there is the figure of a peculiarly Roman executioner of sworn duty. As P. R. Hardie has observed,

> for a Roman of the time of Augustus it was certainly the wounded gladiator who provided the most accessible spectacle of death in arms, and there is a strong feeling of the gladiatorial about the death of Turnus: the sense that these two awesome warriors are fighting for their lives in total isolation, despite and because of the huge audience of spectators; the sequence of disabling blow followed by the *coup de grâce* after Turnus' unsuccessful request for *missio*, a sequence with epic precedents, but which is *not* found in the Homeric account of the death of Hector, for whom the first spear-throw is eventually fatal....[55]

Gladiatorial imagery was familiar to all ranks of Roman society. When Cicero discusses *iracundia* as a disorder of the soul, the example he cites is the bellicose or gladiatorial temper of a passage of Lucilius; he then turns to consider the anger of Homer's Ajax, describing it specifically as "gladiatorial."[56] If then Cicero could so readily construe Homeric heroes as gladiators, any in Vergil's audience who were not born into the privileges of education and textual familiarity with Homer could find, if they were able to gain access to the epic's versification of single combat, that it spoke directly to those sensibilities that had been shaped by all the ludic spectacles that the power of their nation and its leaders had liberally given them.[57]

The final scene of the epic, moreover, in alluding to the rite of *missio* that decided the fate of a fallen fighter, points to the power of aesthetically and emotionally informed discrimination that the Populus exercised in such ludic

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necessity and the fate that awaits Turnus. Once he has spoken, *oculos Rutulorum reicit arvis* (473). Turnus wishes his father could have been present to see him in battle with Pallas (443). Turnus plainly cannot conceive (12.15) of a decisive duel without the presence of spectators.

[55]1986: 152–53. Some elements of vocabulary distinctly imply the arena, particularly in this combat: 12.276, 340, 382, 741; Hardie also notes that the use of *harena* to refer to the dust of the battlefield does not seem to be paralleled before Vergil. In Lucan the imagery is much more obvious: e.g., 4.285–91, 708–10, 788–93, 6.60–63, 695–6; Ahl 56, 86–88, 97–99, 111, and index s.v. *gladiatorial imagery*. Horace has an interesting use of a gladiatorial image to describe contestation far removed from any connotation of killing: in the *Satires* (1.7.18–21), he compares a legal skirmish to a man-to-man combat. In Juvenal we are led to think of a pair of gladiators called Aeneas and Turnus: 1.161–62, where the subject matter for literature is thought of in terms of combat.

[56]*Tusc.* 4.49; cf. P. R. Hardie 1986: 153.

[57]Note Heinze's insistence upon the poet's interest in fights, wounds, and ways of dying (194).

situations. *Missio* was taken very seriously by those who gave gladiatorial spectacles, as is clear from Augustus' express ban upon *gladiatores sine missione*.[58] The rite was valuable because it allowed an unlucky (and perhaps expensive) gladiator to live to fight another day, but also perhaps because this moment of rapt collective attention was an important element in the relations of power articulated at *ludi*. Gladiatorial shows were relatively rare and, in consequently being "vividly recalled," became "an essential means of constructing social and cultural identities."[59] What was often remembered was surely the enthralling moment when the *editor* of the games, seated majestically upon high, made his decision about whether the loser's life was spared or forfeited but signalled his verdict only after he had taken heed of the crowd's sentiments.[60] This practice accordingly models in miniature the relations operating more broadly in the Res Publica, wherein the Populus had no direct executive capacity but rather authorized political agents. Its leaders' actions, moreover, were customarily communicated to the Populus by a variety of rhetorics—including triumphant and charismatic ceremonial, oratorical and inscriptional explanation, and visual and textual monumentalization—by which their significance could readily be apprehended and legitimacy affirmed. The final scene of the epic confounds the roles discharged at a gladiatorial *munus* in a manner that forces an audience to decide what it thinks should be done to Turnus only after his life has already been taken.

Any Roman audience directed keen interest towards the roles performed by both *editor* and gladiator; these Aeneas combines in both deciding and executing. Whilst Augustus as *editor* actively guarded his dignity before the crowd, there was also great attraction in being a spectacle in the arena rather than upon a *pulvinar*.[61] Some men of dignity in the late Republic risked life and limb to become celebrities as spectacular actors rather than merely orchestrators;[62] in 29 a certain senator Q. Vitellius fought as a gladiator at the games held for the dedication of a shrine to Caesar, and sometimes Augustus would employ *equites* for stage and gladiatorial presentations before the Senate

[58]Suet. *Aug.* 45.3. Ville 386–429 describes *missio* in detail.

[59]Edmondson 112.

[60]Emperors even explained unexpected "editorial" decisions to the crowd by placards (Suet. *Cl.* 21; Dio 69.16).

[61]Augustus showed great severity, for instance, towards an actor who seemed to abet an obstreperous heckler: Suet. *Aug.* 45.4.

[62]Caesar staged splendid *spectacula* involving men of considerable social standing: Suet. *Jul.* 39.1.

put a stop to this practice.[63] There would perhaps then be little astonishment at finding the hero of the *Aeneid* a composite of both roles of spectacular celebrity.

Aeneas is also easily comprehensible as a model of duty in his gladiatorial as well as his ceremonial charisma. It has long been a commonplace of Vergilian criticism that Aeneas' character is to some degree informed by Stoicism. Gladiators, however, were just as readily employed as examples in Stoic theorizing as were kingly leaders, since their dutiful condition of sworn servility to inevitability exemplified victory over emotion, thus making gladiatorial spectacles a form of *disciplina.*[64] Seneca indeed was able to model his notion of the *sapiens* after the gladiator.[65] Such a philosophical example is readily grasped by the senses and so could well be comprehended by the intellect of all who witnessed such violent festivity. Stoic epistemology in this case is quite egalitarian.

When Aeneas fights Turnus, the Rutulians in the text rise to their feet, shout, and groan, but this Italian sentiment does not at all influence the hero's decision. Rather, those in the epic's audiences are asked after the fact "to join [Aeneas] and the poet in sorting out the various possibilities and alternatives" regarding the hero's autonomous and passionate action of killing Turnus and founding Rome.[66] Different subjectivities will have various perspectives. Some may feel philosophically troubled about the centrality of anger in human affairs; others, to draw an extreme but not implausible comparison, may simply enjoy the narrative of a good kill. Diversity is encouraged, furthermore, by the poet's determination to subsume within his epic's grand codes not only a vast range of intertextual allusiveness but also those popularly legible *Realien* that make the *Aeneid* capable of demanding serious engagement and interrogation (and possibly even a verdict too) from a *populus universus*. All this is appropriate for poetic ambitions of national significance that also recognized that lurking—and, on the proper occasion, jeering and cheering—under the notion of the nation of Roman citizens was a potential polyphony of individual responses to the epic's final vivid demonstration of both what power in the world can order and what it can be seen itself directly to execute.

[63]Dio 51.22.4–5; Suet. *Aug.* 43.3. Tiberius had to clamp down on nobles who wished to perform in the arena: Suet. *Tib.* 35.2.

[64]Cic. *Tusc.* 2.41; Sen. *Ep.* 37; Barton 15–21.

[65]*Tran.* 11.1–6; Barton 5.

[66]Galinsky 1994: 200. The text has always been, and undoubtedly will remain, open to interpretations: see especially the thesis of P. R. Hardie 1993.

No national, imagined community was likely to have responded to such complex poetics of power with a clear consensus of judgment, but at least its anonymous members of all ranks were contemplating the same conceptualizations and thus worrying too about the same questions. In this respect it is certainly fruitful to think of the *Aeneid* in terms of the pervasive politics of monumentalization of Augustan power and historical significance, insofar as monuments are understood as practical ways of engaging the sensibilities of a wide audience in the present and in posterity without necessarily presupposing either the possibility or the desirability of attaining a monolithic response.[67] No monumentalization of the powerful is ever likely to have provoked unanimity in Rome.[68] Of the Princeps there probably was in general "a multiplicity of views created competitively in numerous monuments and texts, and themselves creatively transformed in the experience and according to the prejudices of the people...."[69] Such an emotional and aesthetic dimension to politics made some statues fragrant with flowers but reduced others to rubble.

If Vergil wanted people to think about and to remember the concerns of his monumental epic, he could hardly avoid making his poem speak directly in a *popularis* manner to all who had seen for themselves the political self-advertisements of the age (and some of whom might have risen to their feet at Tacitus' happy scenario of approbation and veneration). A recognition of the political dynamics of validation in all the central—understood both physically and discursively—spaces of Rome makes the verses of the *Aeneid* as potentially solicitous of popular favor as of learned connoisseurship. While the demographic identity of those whom history has inscribed and constructed for us as the Populus (or for that matter *plebs*, *multitudo* or *vulgus*) inevitably remains opaque, let us try imaginatively to visualize all the ways in which anonymous people in the early Principate could still perhaps realize for

[67]Cf. Galinsky 1996.

[68]Wallace-Hadrill 1989, remarking upon how the Augustan régime's programme of articulating power through monuments, which was "internalized and absorbed until it becomes an integral part of Roman self-awareness...." (159), might have had an ambivalent effect upon all Romans. Monuments were of course accessible to all in the city—to *populus universus* indeed: "the magnificence of the new marble architecture is simultaneously a rejection of the old private *luxuria*; public parks, baths, galleries, libraries and theatres make the culture of the rich directly accessible to the poor of the city."

[69]Elsner 61.

themselves their powers of a discrimination that was at once aesthetic, emotional, and so surely and honestly political.

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