

READING AENEAS' SHIELD

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One of the more obvious examples of Virgil's use of Homeric intertextuality in the *Aeneid* is the ekphrastic description of Aeneas' shield that occupies the last 100 lines or so of Book 8.¹ It might of course be possible to object at the outset that this isn't necessarily obvious at all, in that the scenes depicted on Aeneas' shield on the face of it bear little or no resemblance to those depicted on Achilles'; in place of Homer's generic descriptions of human life in its various aspects we have scenes from Roman history culminating in the Battle of Actium and Augustus' lordship over the entire human race. But given that we are now two-thirds of the way through a poem replete with Homeric allusion, that the circumstances of each shield's manufacture (goddess mother appealing to the craftsman god to make new armour for her son) are closely parallel (though not by any means identical, as we shall see), and that in each case the shield constitutes a prelude to a new and final phase of the hero's role in each epic makes the Homeric intertext inescapable. The fact that the scenes depicted are so radically different is something that we are of course expected to notice—as so often when Virgil employs Homeric allusion, it is differences that engender meaning—but we cannot notice them or respond appropriately to them unless we are already programmed to see *Iliad* 18 as the key text. As indeed we are.

The evidence for this is not merely circumstantial. There are intriguing structural parallels (see Figure 1). Homer's description comprises three basic elements: (1) the City at Peace, (2) the City at War and (3) six scenes from everyday life, all framed by earth, sea, sky and the heavenly bodies at the beginning and the river of Okeanos at the end. Virgil's description comprises the same three elements, but in reverse order: first six scenes from Roman history, secondly the Battle of Actium (corresponding to the City at War) and thirdly what Tacitus was to call *pax et principatus* (*Ann.* 3.28), the Roman world at peace with Augustus at its head—this of course corresponding to Homer's City of Peace.² Within each of the three central elements one can see further parallels. In Homer's City at Peace there are two sections: first the marriage festivities and secondly the elders 'sitting on polished stone within the sacred circle' (504) arbitrating in a legal dispute in the *agora*, for which two talents are promised to whoever gives the best judgement. The corresponding passage in Virgil likewise contains two sections: first the festivities associated with the triple triumph and secondly Augustus seated in the temple of Palatine Apollo receiving gifts from the nations of the world. In Homer's City at War the description focuses first on one side, then on the other, and incorporates a number of divinities in its representation; so in Virgil we focus first on the Augustan side, then on Antony and Cleopatra, and in the subsequent battle narrative gods similarly figure in the representation, playing important roles. And in both poets the series of six scenes concludes with one of traditional dancing: Homer alludes to the dancing-floor constructed by Daidalos for Ariadne in Knossos and tells of a dance incorporating running and leaping; Virgil gives us the *Salii* and the *Luperci*. As opening frame Virgil has substituted for Homer's cosmic overview a more specific one: *res Italas Romanorumque triumphos* ('Italian affairs

1 The bibliography on Virgil is vast, and I make no pretence to be familiar with everything that has been written on Aeneas' shield. The more recent discussions which I have consulted are G. Williams (1983), 152-56; Hardie (1986), 336-76; West (1990); Boyle (1999), 156-61. As will be apparent, I find the last to be the most stimulating and insightful.

2 On Virgil's 'two cities' cf. Hardie (1986), 358-62.

and the triumphs of the Romans', *Aen.* 8.626), this by way of introducing his Romanised world; as closing frame in place of Homer's encircling Okeanos we have the rivers Euphrates, Rhine and Araxes and a list of tribes that dwell on the fringes of empire, soon to be incorporated within it if not already so.

Figure 1: The shields of Achilles and Aeneas

Achilles' shield (*Iliad* 18.483-608)

1. Earth, sea, sky, stars (483-89)
2. City at Peace (490-508)
 - 2.1 Marriage festivities (491-96)
 - 2.2 Judging a dispute (497-508)
3. City at War (509-50)
 - 3.1 The two sides (509-13)
 - 3.2 Sortie by the defenders (514-26)
 - 3.3 Counter by the attackers (527-40)
4. Six scenes (541-606)
 - 4.1 Ploughing (541-49)
 - 4.2 Reaping (550-60)
 - 4.3 Vintage (561-72)
 - 4.4 Lions attacking cattle (573-86)
 - 4.5 Sheep (587-89)
 - 4.6 Dancing (590-606)
5. Ocean as surround (607-08)

Aeneas' shield (*Aeneid* 8.626-728)

1. General summary (626-29)
2. Six scenes (629-66)
 - 2.1 Suckling she-wolf (630-34)
 - 2.2 Sabine women (635-41)
 - 2.3 Death of Mettus (642-45)
 - 2.4 Porsenna (646-54)
 - 2.5 Gauls attack Rome (655-62)
 - 2.6 Dancing and ceremony (663-66)

[Cato and Catiline (666-70)]
3. City at War (Battle of Actium 671-713)
 - 3.1 The two sides (671-88)
 - 3.2 Battle joined (689-703)
 - 3.3 Victory (704-13)
4. City at Peace (714-23)
 - 4.1 Festivities (714-19)
 - 4.2 Caesar triumphant (720-23)
5. Remote tribes and rivers (724-28)

The question of why Virgil has reversed Homer's ordering of the three central elements I shall leave aside for the moment. First let us look briefly at how Virgil has modified Homer's content. To begin with the obvious: where Homer is synchronic, Virgil is diachronic; where Homer is generic, Virgil is specific; where Homer describes the shield as Hephaistos makes it, Virgil describes it as the recipient reads it; Homer's description evokes the present, Virgil's the future; Homer's is of the world that Achilles has abandoned, Virgil's of one that Aeneas will embrace (however uncomprehendingly), the end towards which his mission is directed. Both describe a world as perceived and given form by a divine craftsman. Homer gives us a universal picture beginning with the elements earth, air, water, and fire (earth, sky, sea, sun/moon/stars), rimmed at the end by the river Okeanos, and focuses on the whole range of

human activity that takes place within this cosmic framework. For Virgil, the generic city has become Rome, the generic war the Battle of Actium, the generic peace the *pax Augusta*, the generic scenes scenes from Roman history. The radical change to Homer's description underscores the reality of Rome's world-domination and the new world order: the only significant events are those of Roman history, the culmination of that history is Actium and the establishment of the Augustan regime, nothing confines or defines this world other than Rome itself. Thus it is that in place of Homer's fixed rim of Okeanos we have the (ever-expanding) boundaries of empire, no longer described as running round the edge of the shield but as part of the world that Augustus contemplates from his seat in the temple of Apollo, a world in which there is nothing that is not Roman. This is the *imperium sine fine* that Jupiter announces as *fait accompli* in Book 1: *imperium sine fine dedi* ('I have granted them empire without end', *Aen.* 1.279).³

That is the overview; let us now look at some details. Virgil introduces his description of the shield thus:

illic res Italas Romanorumque triumphos
 haud uatum ignarus uenturique inscius aevi
 fecerat ignipotens, illic genus omne futurae
 stirpis ab Ascanio pugnataque in ordine bella.
 fecerat et...

(*Aen.* 8.626-30)

There the Lord of Fire, well-versed in the seers and aware of the age to come, had worked Italian affairs and the triumphs of the Romans, there [too] the whole family that would spring from Ascanius and their wars fought in order. He had also worked...

It is with this passage that Virgil replaces the first part of Homer's shield, the representation of earth, sky, sea and heavenly bodies. In place of Homer's four elements we have instead 'Italian affairs', 'the triumphs of the Romans', 'the descendants of Ascanius' and 'their wars fought in order'. What follows is normally taken to be the detail of which this is an introductory summary. But the implication of the *et* in line 630 is that what follows is additional to what is summarised here. The anaphora of *fecerat* in lines 628 and 630 seems intended to echo Homer's μέν and δέ construction, where the μέν of *Iliad* 18.486 (ἐν μὲν γαῖαν ἔτευξ') is answered by a δέ at every subsequent point where new material is inserted into the design. (And the change of tense from Greek aorist to Latin pluperfect also reminds us that this is something already effected, that we are reading this description of the design as Venus presents the work to her son, not as Vulcan is designing it.)⁴ If we take Virgil's words at face value, this shield becomes something of mind-boggling complexity, containing within it not just what is described but the entire course of Roman history *ab urbe condita* plus all the achievements of the *gens Iulia* as well. That is the weight that Aeneas is carrying on his shoulders as he hefts the shield at the end of Book 8. The scenes actually described would thus become a selection from a vast range of possibilities.⁵ Such a selection process of course

3 Cf. Hardie (1986), 353-58, 362-66.

4 On the pluperfects cf. G. Williams (1983), 153; West (1990), 303f.

5 So Hardie (1986), 346; West (1990), 298.

reflects what Virgil is actually doing, choosing from Roman history certain scenes with which he wishes to confront his reader, and the interest lies in why *these* scenes and why these scenes *so described*.

It would be hard to draw more than a tenuous link between the content of Homer's 'six scenes' and that of Virgil's. The significant intertextual fact as far as Homer is concerned is that the number of scenes in both is six, and that in both the series ends with one involving dancing. The key texts for *content* here are (a) Ennius, the original Roman Homer, first to impose the Greek hexameter on to Latin and turn Roman history into Homeric epic, and (b) Livy. All of Virgil's 'six scenes' are drawn from the first pentad of Livy's history, which culminates in the sack of Rome by the Gauls in c.390 BCE. Indeed, Livy's history, actual or putative, can be seen as the text which the shield translates into art; the actual published part as Virgil was writing comprised the first pentad,⁶ but the preface makes clear that the intention was to continue down to his own time (*donec ad haec tempora...peruentum est*, praef. 9). Virgil's text represents that transformation. The image of the she-wolf suckling the baby twins mirrors Livy's description in its evocation of the animal's unnatural gentleness; but by incorporating the phrase *tereti ceruice reflexa* ('with rounded neck bent back') taken from Cicero's Aratean description of the constellation Draco (quoted at *DND* 2.107 and already recycled by Lucretius in his description of the twins' father Mavors at *DRN* 1.35) manages to inject a hint of serpent imagery⁷ into what otherwise appears a model of political and ideological correctness. (Livy's method was to offer a far earthier alternative reading of *lupa* [1.4.7].) The other scenes all raise questions, particularly given Livy's emphasis in his address to his (imperial) reader on the moral value of studying history:

hoc illud est praecipue in cognitione rerum salubre ac frugiferum, omnis te exempli documenta in inlustri posita monumento intueri; inde tibi tuaeque rei publicae quod imitere capias, inde foedum inceptu foedum exitu quod uites.

(Liv. praef. 10)

This is what is especially healthy and fruitful in coming to an understanding of events, that you get to look at all kinds of examples you can learn from, set out and highlighted on a monument; there you may garner for yourself and your *res publica* things to imitate, there too find and so avoid what is foul from beginning to end.

The episode of the Sabine women, involving a gross violation of the guest-host relationship, is hardly a glorious episode in Rome's history; and the sacrifice of the sow with which the ensuing treaty between Romulus and Titus Tatius is ratified (an element not found in Livy) recalls the grim sacrifice of the sow with her thirty piglets to Juno which occurred towards the beginning of Book 8 (81-85). The barbaric quartering (I should say halving) of the Alban Mettius Fufetius, the third of Virgil's scenes, actually prompted this comment from Livy:

auertere omnes ab tanta foeditate spectacula oculos. primum ultimumque illud supplicium apud Romanos exempli parum memoris legum humanarum fuit.

(Livy 1.25.11)

6 On the dating of Livy's first pentad, see Luce (1965).

7 For the negative implications of serpent imagery in the *Aeneid* see Boyle (1972), 82-85.

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All turned their eyes away from so foul a sight. Among Romans that was the first and last use of a punishment too little mindful of the laws of humanity.

Virgil on the other hand forces us to turn our eyes back to the scene, focusing on the bushes stained with blood from the fragments of Mettius' body as they are dragged over them. (The obvious intratextual link here is to the disfigurement of Deiphobus at 6.494ff.) The fourth scene, the attempt by Porsenna to reinstate the Tarquins, seems at first sight much more positive, involving as it does a salute to the legendary heroism of Horatius Cocles, Cloelia and (though Virgil does not mention him) Mucius Scaevola, characters about whom Livy writes at some length (2.10-14). But the point is that this heroism is displayed in defence of freedom (*Aeneadae in ferrum pro libertate ruebant*, 'the descendants of Aeneas were rushing to war on behalf of liberty', 648); is the self-styled restorer of the *res publica* truly a *uindex libertatis* of this kind?⁸ And then we come to the Gallic sack of Rome. Again, this is one of those stirring tales from Rome's past, involving the dignified conduct of the senators facing death, the Capitol saved by the sacred geese, and the heroism of Camillus, with whose stirring speech advocating that the Romans stay and rebuild their city rather than move elsewhere Livy's first pentad ends. But Virgil does not mention Camillus. Instead he focuses on Manlius—Manlius, who later attempted to overthrow the constitution and in consequence was thrown from the very Tarpeian rock which he had defended; Manlius, who, himself a patrician, turned against his own class and sought to use the favour of the mob to make himself tyrant. We shall meet another such within a few lines. Meanwhile the series ends with the dancing Salii, the college of priests established by Numa to look after the *ancilia*, and the Luperci, whose association with the cave in which the wolf suckled Romulus and Remus links back to the first scene.

The ekphrasis now leaps into modern history, travelling via Catiline and Cato (of whom more anon) to the Battle of Actium and its aftermath. As I have indicated, this corresponds to Homer's City at War. For Homer, the description of the besieged city, the debate among the besiegers whether to obliterate it or come to a settlement involving handover of property, and the moves and counter-moves of defenders and attackers has obvious affinities with the war being fought around Troy, the context in which the action of the *Iliad* is set. For Virgil, the Trojan War was the start of the story, as the Olympian gods move in to effect the destruction of the city (*Aen.* 2.601-18) in order to create the circumstances for a new Troy to emerge. Now these same Olympians are present at the final chapter, the climactic battle which will see Augustus (and civilisation as we know it) triumph. But as Augustus (as Virgil prematurely calls him) and Agrippa move against the forces of Antony and Cleopatra, a significant transformation takes place. The twin flames that shoot up from Augustus' head and his association with a star (the *patrium sidus*) at 680f. link him to Homer's Achilles (see esp. *Iliad* 18.206-14 and 22.26-32); and the conviction that the gods are on their side recalls the stirring conclusion of Diomedes' speech at *Iliad* 9.46-49 where he imagines himself and Sthenelos succeeding on their own in sacking Troy because 'it was with god that we came here'—a heroic fantasy echoed by Achilles in his speech to Patroklos at 16.97-100. It is as if Augustus and Agrippa, commander and lieutenant, have become a Diomedes/Sthenelos or Achilles/Patroklos combination. And on the other side Antony is described as accompanied by *ope barbarica uariisque armis* ('barbarian resources and motley arms', 685), which recalls

⁸ An accolade claimed by post-Actium Octavian on his coins: in full, *Imp[erator] Caesar Diui F[ilius] Cos VI Libertatis P[opuli] R[omani] Vindex* ('Imperator Caesar, son of the Divine One, Consul for the sixth time, Champion of the Liberty of the Roman People') (28 BCE).

Homer's description of the Trojans at *Iliad* 4.433-38 as being like bleating sheep (the original meaning of βάρβαροι) and πολύκλητοι, 'called in from all over the place'. The artist's frown at his relationship with his *Aegyptia coniunx* (*nefas*, 688) also marks Antony as a Trojan figure. The twin snakes (*geminos...angues*) that loom over Cleopatra at 697 recall the twin snakes (*gemini...angues*) that attack Laocoon in Book 2 (2.203f.), themselves emblems of the Greeks as they prepare to move in on Troy from their hiding place behind Tenedos. Like the Trojan War, this is a battle of west versus east, Augustus leading the Italians (678) and Antony Egyptians, Bactrians and other orientals (687f.). Vulcan as he constructs his work of art *haud uatum ignarus* (627) seems only too well aware of the Sibyl's prophecy at 6.89f.; Augustus becoming Achilles prefigures and reflects Aeneas doing precisely that in the Iliadic war that takes place in Latium in Books 9-12, the only difference being that Augustus is the son not of a goddess but a god (as the *patrium sidus* is there to remind us).⁹ One might also say that the contempt with which the Olympians treat the venerable gods of Egypt (at least one of whom had an established cult at Rome)¹⁰ prefigures and reflects the contempt and arrogance with which they treat the native Italian gods in the latter part of the poem (e.g. from Book 12 Jupiter's rape and Juno's cynical manipulation of Juturna, and Venus wrenching Aeneas' spear from the stump in which Faunus was holding it).

The aftermath of Actium gives us the passage that corresponds to Homer's City at Peace. There is an important contrast in the earlier part of this description; whereas the Homeric festivities are associated with marriage (a celebration of life), those at Rome are associated with Augustus' triple triumph, a celebration of the defeat and death of his political opponents. And in the other part of Homer's description, the arbitration scene, there is an even more significant contrast. In Homer we read:

οἱ δὲ γέροντες
ἦατ' ἐπὶ ξεστοῖσι λίθοις ἱερῶ ἐνὶ κύκλῳ,
σκῆπτρα δὲ κηρύκων ἐν χέρσ' ἔχον ἠεροφώνων·
τοῖσιν ἔπειτ' ἦϊσσον, ἀμοιβηδὶς δὲ δίκασον.
κεῖτο δ' ἄρ' ἐν μέσσοισι δύω χρυσοῖο τάλαντα,
τῷ δόμεν ὃς μετὰ τοῖσι δίκην ἰθύντατα εἶποι.

(*Iliad* 18.503-06)

The elders were seated on polished stones in a sacred circle, and held in their hands the sceptres of the loud-voiced heralds. With these they arose and gave their judgement in turn. And in their midst were lying two talents of gold, to be given to whoever among them gave the straightest judgement.

Augustus on the other hand is seated alone in his snow-white, pristine new temple, counting up the tribute (*dona*) brought in by subject peoples. In the Homeric description we have an emphasis on legality and the right way of doing things; the elders occupy sacred space, their right to pronounce judgement is conferred on them by the sceptre which each holds, and the

9 That Aeneas rather than Turnus embodies the fulfilment of the Sibyl's prophecy *alius Latio iam par-tus Achilles* ('another Achilles is now born in Latium', *Aen.* 6.89) is cogently argued by Boyle (1972), 65-70, 130-32.

10 Isis: cf. Ovid *Ars Amatoria* 1.77f., 3.393, 635. But as Zanker (1988), 109, observes, these 'foreign' gods were never beneficiaries of the Augustan building program; a sign of the prevailing 'political correctness'.

'gift' here is for the one who gives the straightest judgement in the case. Augustus too occupies sacred space, but it is one that he builds for himself and the 'gifts' are the consequence of conquest. There is another important element here, too. In his *Res Gestae* Augustus claims that what he did by defeating Antony and Cleopatra was restore the republic (RG 34). One of the fundamental principles of Rome's republican constitution was that of collegiality. In the *Iliad*'s City of Peace the elders act as a group, giving their judgements in turn. Augustus on the other hand is emphatically alone (*ipse sedens*, 720) and on the issue of what or who gives him the authority to play the role that he does there is deafening silence.

Let us return to Catiline and Cato. There are those who might accuse me of a Procrustean approach in arguing for structural similarities between Homer's shield and Virgil's, in that if we include Catiline and Cato in Virgil's series there are seven scenes rather than six. That we should do so might be argued on the basis of the fact that the Catiline and Cato passage actually (and uniquely) starts in the middle of a line (*hinc procul addit*, 'far from these he adds', second half of line 666). But I think we are invited to regard Catiline and Cato more as the prelude to Actium than as the seventh in the series of scenes from Roman history. For a start, *hinc procul* suggests a distancing from what precedes. Where connectives are supplied for the other scenes, the suggestion is quite the opposite: linking 1 and 2 is *nec procul hinc* ('and not far from here', 635), 2 and 3 *haud procul inde* ('not far from there', 642), 3 and 4 *nec non* ('and moreover', 646), 4 and 5 nothing (except that Cocles' and Cloelia's actions by the Tiber are presumably overlooked by Manlius' on the Capitol), and 5 and 6 *hic* ('here', 663). Catiline and Cato are distanced from all these in space. And also in time. As I pointed out earlier, all the previous six scenes come from Livy's first pentad; with Catiline we shift to modern history, an occurrence from Virgil's own lifetime. There is moreover quite a remarkable change in tense. On all other occasions where Vulcan's artistic activity is denoted, the tense is pluperfect: *fecerat*, 628, 630, 710; *addiderat*, 637; *extuderat*, 665; *finxerat*, 726. Here, oddly, we have the present, *addit*. And the content is odd, too. The focus on the afterlife makes the whole passage look like an intrusion from Book 6, with its moralistic distinction between the damned in Tartarus and the pious souls in the Elysian Fields. As an ideologically and politically correct distinction between traitor and patriot it appears to form an admirable introduction to the description of Actium where the participants are similarly simplistically categorised as goodies and baddies, and that this is how it should be regarded is further suggested by the linking *haec inter* ('among these things', 671) with which Actium is introduced. But like everything on this shield, it bears further thinking about. Why the shift to the present tense? It is almost as if this scene is being added as Aeneas looks at it, as though we see the artist drawing his reader's attention away from the lays of ancient Rome to something more uncomfortably modern. From Livy perhaps to Sallust. Who is this Cato who is represented as laying down the law to the pious (*his dantem iura Catonem*, 670)? We could assume that it is Cato the elder, staunch republican, tenacious preserver of the *mos maiorum*, architect of the final annihilation of Rome's first African enemy as Augustus is depicted as being of the last. But if we take Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae* as the intertextual reference, then surely it is Cato the younger who becomes the more likely candidate:¹¹ Cato to whom Sallust gives the traditionalist's response to Caesar's moral equivocation over the sentence to be meted out to the conspirators, Cato whose moral principles led him to take the republican side against Caesar in the civil war, Cato whose histrionic suicide at Utica was scripted out of Plato's *Phaedo* and

11 This seems to be the consensus of modern scholarship: see Quinn (1968), 197; G. Williams (1983), 155; R.D. Williams (1985), 91; Bishop (1988), 181.

thus made him if anyone deserving of the kind of afterlife that Socrates predicted for himself in that work, Cato who became for later imperial writers the archetypal republican hero, the essential anti-Caesar. And on the other side Catiline, member like Manlius of an aristocratic family who turned class traitor in an attempt to seize control of the *res publica*, showing the way to the equally aristocratic and equally impoverished C. Julius Caesar, whose only difference from the other two was that he succeeded where they failed and so became a god instead, his star shining above Augustus as he confronts Antony at Actium. That is how the victors rewrite history. If we read the Catiline-Cato vignette this way, the Actium event that it introduces takes on a very different colouring. This is *the Roman Revolution*.

Now it is of course possible to read the shield as what it appears at face value to be: a series of scenes commemorating significant events in Roman history, events which show Rome's expanding power, her skill in diplomacy, her courage in adversity, her dedication to republican ideals, all reified in Actium and its aftermath as the new founder of Rome presides over her domination of a world to which she imparts her values. But as the above analysis has shown, it is also possible to read almost all of these scenes as problematic, drawing attention to the disjunction between ideology and practice and revealing the ascendancy of Augustus to be exactly what it must have appeared to be: the establishment of a monarchy, the seizure of the *res publica* by a private individual. The rape of the Sabine women might lead one to reflect that Augustus too had seized another man's wife and married her himself; the punishment of Mettius might lead one to think about the atrocities committed by Augustus in the years following Caesar's assassination (recorded by Suetonius *Div. Aug.* 13-15); the resistance to Porsenna might lead to reflections on the heroism displayed by past Romans in defence of *libertas* (and perhaps link to Cato); and as stated above, while the survival of Rome in the face of Gallic attack is one of the great stories of early Roman history, it also makes us think about the similarity between Manlius and the Caesars (particularly Julius, where we once again see a link between Gallic War and *coup d'état*). Possible negative readings of Actium and its aftermath I have dealt with already.

Virgil's shield ekphrasis is the culmination of two sets of three in the *Aeneid*. It is firstly the third and final in the series of propagandistic passages, the first being Jupiter's prophecy to Venus in Book 1 and the second the catalogue of great Romans and the ideological justification of empire given by Anchises in Book 6. If we take these as context we are predisposed to give a positive reading to the images on the shield as well. But it is also the third and final in the series of great ekphrases, the first two of which also occur in Books 1 and 6: the description of the frescoes on Juno's temple in Carthage in Book 1 and that of the temple doors carved by Daedalus early in Book 6.¹² If we take these as context, we might become a little less inclined to the positive reading. In each case the artwork described is an analogue in one way or another of the *Aeneid* and its creator an analogue of the *Aeneid*'s poet, Virgil; in each case Aeneas is the reader. In the first the scenes from the Trojan War are represented so as to emphasise the misery and pain war causes, particularly the way in which it destroys young lives; so it will be with Virgil's own descriptions of war in Books 9-12. The inspiration which motivates the anonymous artist, as his reader Aeneas well realises, is a sense of the tragedy inherent in human life: *sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt* (1.462). The second shows scenes on the one side of imperialism and the abuse of power, on the other of disastrous love; we will find both of these also in the *Aeneid*. The artist here is moved both by

12 On these and their significance see above all Pope (1974).

grief at the loss of his son and by sympathy for the women whose lives have been ruined by love (the link between Ariadne and Dido is obvious, as is that between Daedalus' sympathy for Ariadne and Virgil's for Dido). But what of the third? Motive first. The narrative preceding the ekphrasis of the shield's design shows Aeneas' mother Venus playing a similar role to that of Thetis in Book 18 of the *Iliad*, pleading with the craftsman god to make new armour for her son. But there is a crucial difference. Thetis bases her appeal to Hephaistos purely and simply on the god's compassion; she has no favours to call in (as was the case with her original appeal to Zeus back in Book 1), she is simply a mother grieving over her doomed son who has determined on a course of action that will lead to his early death. And the kindly Hephaistos agrees at once to do as she asks. The relationship between Venus and Vulcan is far more complex. For a start, they were on opposite sides in the Trojan War; as Hephaistos, Vulcan engaged in that elemental fire and water conflict with Xanthos in *Iliad* 21, in which as fire he came to the rescue of Achilles, the hero with whom he is most consistently associated; this I think is recalled in Virgil by the repetitious use of the epithet *ignipotens*, Lord of Fire, to denote the god. More seriously, Venus notoriously neglects her lame craftsman husband in favour of Mars (who *was* on her side in the Trojan War and who is nicely caught *in flagrante* with Venus in Book 8 of the *Odyssey*: indeed, that net was probably the last thing Vulcan made for her). Asking nicely is just not going to work; his response to her initial request is encapsulated in the one word *cunctantem* ('hanging back') at 8.388.¹³ But even as this word appears in the text it is surrounded by images of the goddess's snow-white arms moving *hinc atque hinc* around her husband's body in the closest we get to an explicit sex-scene in the poem. In other words, she seduces him; so, as a work of art, this shield is the product of seduction.

So in what way is the shield an analogue of the *Aeneid* and Vulcan an analogue of its author? The simple fact that on a superficial level the passage reads as panegyric of Augustus as champion of Rome and the *mos maiorum*, a continuation of Jupiter's prophecy in Book 1 and the parade of great Romans compered by Anchises in Book 6, whereas if subjected to serious scrutiny it reveals itself as something very different—this itself makes it very much like a miniature *Aeneid*. But there is another aspect to this, too. As I sought to demonstrate in my schematic summary of the two shield descriptions, Virgil has taken the elements of Homer's description and reversed them. This he does for sound narrative and thematic reasons. It enables him to begin with scenes from Roman history, then move to the Battle of Actium and finally to the image of *pax et principatus* with which the description closes, as if Actium and its aftermath are the culminating point in that historical process which began with the she-wolf suckling the twins: Augustus as second founder, the new Romulus, the wheel come full circle. The same can be said for the *Aeneid* as a whole, where Virgil famously reverses the order of the Homeric *oeuvre* as a whole, with the Odyssean half preceding the Iliadic half—this too done for sound narrative and thematic reasons (though these would need another paper to develop). And Vulcan as Virgil? The message to the reader contained in the circumstances of the shield's creation (and here I switch to direct speech) is as follows. Please remember that I was seduced into writing this stuff, and it has to look as if I am paying my dues. *He* won't understand, any more than Aeneas does; he'll just think he's getting what he paid for, because that's what he expects to find. But if you read with discernment and apply your knowledge of Homer, learned reader, you'll find quite another message emerging

13 On the significance of this word in this and other contexts of the *Aeneid*, see Boyle (1999), 156.

from this material. Think too about what you have read earlier in my poem when you come to these lines:

illam inter caedes pallentem morte futura
 fecerat ignipotens undis et Iapyge ferri,
 contra autem magno maerentem corpore Nilum
 pandentemque sinus et tota ueste uocantem
 caeruleum in gremium latebrosaue flumina uictos.
 at Caesar...

(*Aen.* 8.709-14)

The Lord of Fire had worked her [Cleopatra] amidst the slaughter, pale with her approaching death, being carried by the waves and the Calabrian wind; and on the other side the Nile, grieving with his whole body, opening his bosom and with all his raiment calling the vanquished into his sky-blue lap and the hiding-place of his waters. But Caesar...

Virgil does not employ formulae very often, so when he does it is striking. *fecerat ignipotens* occurs twice only in the shield ekphrasis, at the very beginning (see 6.628 quoted above) and here. This is designed to give an indication of the importance of this scene in the artist's mind, setting it up as a counterweight to that universal picture of Rome and the *gens Iulia* that the earlier passage describes. And there is of course another intratextual allusion here: *pallentem morte futura* echoes *pallida morte futura*, used of Dido at 4.644. The phrase transposes into the soon-to-suicide Cleopatra the emotional turmoil felt by and the sympathy we as readers felt for Dido in the harrowing suicide scene at the end of Book 4; and the abrupt transfer from distraught Cleopatra and sorrowing Nile to Augustus seated in triumph and counting the loot thus leaves as bad a taste as the similarly abrupt transfers from distraught and sleepless Dido to sleeping Aeneas *certus eundi* at 4.554 or from the final collapse of warmth and life from Dido's body to Aeneas *certus iter* at the beginning of Book 5. So nice to be sure you're right and to know where you're going; too bad about the human wreckage you leave behind.

Thus Vulcan as artist shares with the anonymous painter of the frescoes at Carthage and with Daedalus a compassion for the victims of war, tyranny and unhappy love that is so manifestly displayed by Virgil himself. Yes, the *Aeneid* was a commissioned work, just like the shield; but as the snakes and scorpions that lurk in the lush acanthus foliage of the *Ara Pacis* testify, if you ask an artist of true integrity to prostitute his talent in your service you may get more than you bargained for.

One final point. In *Iliad* 18 Homer introduces his description of Hephaistos' artistry thus:

ἀὐτὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ
 ποίει δαίδαλα πολλὰ ἰδυίησι πραπίδεσσιν.

(*Iliad* 18.481f.)

And on it [the shield] he works many intricate designs with his skilful craftsmanship.

The emphasis, as throughout the subsequent ekphrasis, is on the skill and artistry of the designer. Virgil, however, introduces his shield with the words *clipei non enarrabile textum*

READING AENEAS' SHIELD

(‘the indescribable fabric of the shield’, 8.625), the final object of the verbs *miratur* and *uer-sat* of which Aeneas is the subject back in line 619. As I indicated earlier, in the *Aeneid* the shield is described as Aeneas reads it. As reader, Aeneas becomes less discerning with each ekphrasis; at the end of this third and final one his reaction is described as follows:

talia per clipeum Volcani, dona parentis,
miratur rerumque ignarus imagine gaudet.

(*Aen.* 8.729f.)

These were the sorts of things over Vulcan’s shield he marvelled at, the gift of his mother, and ignorant of their meaning he rejoiced at the appearance.

The imperial reader (which is what Aeneas has now become) simply does not comprehend what he is seeing. This suggests a more pertinent meaning for *non enarrabile*: as Servius recognised, there is something illogical about declaring something ‘indescribable’ and then going on to describe it; so I would suggest we translate it as ‘undecipherable’.¹⁴ As the conclusion to Book 8 shows, such it certainly is to Aeneas. The almost overwhelming temptation to render *textum* as ‘text’ I shall resist.¹⁵

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14 Cf. the liver *inenarrabilitate absumptum*, ‘consumed by incomprehensibility’, at Livy 41.15.2.

15 This with very minor modifications is the text of a paper given at the ANU Latin Epic Seminar, Canberra, 9-10 April 2005. Many thanks to Claire Jamset for organising this most enjoyable event.