

In 8.615-629, Venus delivers the arms Vulcan has crafted to the delighted Aeneas, and Virgil begins a description of the weapons and particularly the shield, which continues another hundred lines. For Gransden, this passage functions as a respite, but at the same time it iterates on the subjects of war and empire building, and thus is a fitting segue to books 9-12.¹ Thematically, it introduces a long passage which furthers the “optimistic” reading of the book as a positive account of Augustan history with the portrayal of the Battle of Actium (6.671-713), and its disproportionate weight amongst “res Italas Romanorumque triumphos.”²

We can observe here a microcosm of the thematic, intertextual, and stylistic elements that characterize the *Aeneid* as a whole. I intend to pay particular attention to: elements which accentuate the link between Aeneas and Augustus; the intertextual relationship between the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*; and intratextual inconsistencies which subvert the reading of the *Aeneid* as a straightforward patriotic text.³

615 dixit, et amplexus nati Cytherea petiuit,
 616 arma sub aduersa posuit radiantia quercu.
 617 ille deae donis et tanto laetus honore
 618 expleri nequit atque oculos per singula uoluit
 619 miraturque interque manus et brachia versat
 620 terribilem cristis galeam flammasque uomentem
 621 fatiferumque ensem, loricam ex aere rigentem
 622 sanguineam, ingentem, qualis cum caerulea nubes
 623 solis inardescit radiis longeque refulget;
 624 tum leuis ocreas electro auroque recocto,
 625 hastamque et clipei non enarrabile textum.
 626 illic res Italas Romanorumque triumphos
 627 haud uatum ignarus uenturique inscius aeui
 628 fecerat ignipotens, illic genus omne futurae
 629 stirpis ab Ascanio pugnataque in ordine bella.⁴

615 said Venus, and sought an embrace from her son,
 616 then placed the gleaming arms against an oak.
 617 He, delighted at the honor and the goddess's gifts,
 618 couldn't get his fill of looking, and one by one
 619 admired them, turning them in his hands:
 620 the terrible helmet, its crest pouring forth flames,
 621 the doom bringing sword, the breastplate rigid with bronze:
 622 huge, blood-red, just as a dark cloud
 623 glows with the sun's rays, reflecting them far,
 624 then the shining greaves of electrum and pure gold,
 625 the lance and the indescribable fabric of the shield.
 626 The lord of fire had depicted there, not at all ignorant
 627 of prophecy nor of generations to come, Italian stories
 628 and triumphs of the Romans, all the future
 629 descendants of Ascanius and their wars fought in order.

¹ Gransden, 1976, p. 161; Boyle, 1999, p. 153

² Hardie, 2015, p. 17

³ For a synopsis of the “propaganda or coded critique?” question, see Mendelsohn, 2018.

⁴ Mynors, 1969, 301-2. The issues in the transmitted text are minor: the most prominent is a question around *uomentem* (620), which is supported by other occurrences in the *Aeneid*. See Conington, 1883, p. 145

615 **amplexus...petiuit** O'Hara remarks that Aeneas finally gets a hug, alluding to the scenes where he does not (1.408-9; 2.790-4; 6.697-702). *amplexus* also recalls Venus's seduction of Vulcan, by which she convinces him to craft the arms she is about to present to Aeneas (8.388, 405).

Cytherea Epithet for Venus.

616 The symmetry of this line, nearly a golden line but for *sub*, creates a sense of awe.⁵

aduersa The sense is "opposite"; the arms are placed in a position to be easily seen.⁶

radiantia Here begins a list of words which evoke innate and reflected sources of light and brightness: *radiantia*, *flammas*, *radiis solis*, *inardescit*, *refulget*, *leuis*. These accentuate the impression that Aeneas is amazed, even physically dazzled, which is recalled in the final verb—*miratur*—of book 8.

quercu Oak, which begins a reference to *Argonautica* which continues with the imagery at line 623, where the golden fleece is also found hanging on an oak.⁷ Oak may further reference Augustus, who was awarded the *civica corona*, an oak wreath.⁸

617 **honore** For Servius, the honor is Venus's presence and appearance in her full divinity; for most modern scholars it is the gifts or their richness, following *donis*.⁹

618 **expleri nequit** "his eyes *cannot be satisfied*", "he *cannot get his fill* of looking". Episodes in the *Aeneid* characteristically possess referents in Homer, and in this case, the phrasing and narrative mimics the scene where Achilles receives his own armor from Thetis, although Achilles *can* be satisfied: "he rejoiced as he held in his hands the glorious gifts of the god. And when he had satisfied his heart in looking at its elaborateness..."¹⁰ The analogy with Achilles, whose brutality Aeneas mourned in seeing the art at Juno's temple at Carthage (1.468-88), is uncomfortable.¹¹ But the comparison isn't static; Turnus is also portrayed as a new Achilles, which makes Aeneas his counter, a new Hector.¹²

oculos Functions with *expleri* and with *uoluit*.¹³

619 **mirartur...versat** These govern the accusatives which follow, which comprise a list of the weapons he examines.

620 **flammasque uomentem** The flaming crest of the helmet evokes Augustus as he will appear in the shield's depiction of the battle of Actium (680-1).¹⁴

621 **fatiferumque** Probably a coinage by Virgil, connoting both fateful and doom-bringing. This will be the sword that kills Turnus.

⁵ Gransden, 1976, p. 160; for Virgilian style elements more generally, see O'Hara, 1997. For meter in Virgil, see O'Hara, 2018, p. 119

⁶ Conington, 1883, p. 145; MacLennan, 2017, p. 218

⁷ Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.125, translated by William H. Race: "The two of them went along a pathway toward the hallowed grove, in search of the huge oak tree on which the fleece had been hung, like a cloud that glows red from the fiery beams of the rising sun."; Eden, 1975, p. 163

⁸ MacLennan, 2017, p. 218

⁹ Ramires, 2022, p. 196; Fratantuono, 2018, p. 643

¹⁰ *Il.* 19.18-9, translation by Caroline Alexander; O'Hara, 2018, p. 97

¹¹ Boyle, 1999, p. 159

¹² Dekel, 2014, p.110-3. In Barchiesi, 2007, p. 117, the interesting comment that the phrasing *alius Latin iam partus Achilles* (6.89) suggests not just *another* Achilles but a different one: a losing Achilles?

¹³ MacLennan, 2017, p. 218

¹⁴ Boyle, 1999, p. 153; In Bartsch, 2021: "From high on the stern, his bright brow poured twin flames."

ensem We learn that Turnus also had a sword crafted by Vulcan, highlighting his status as rival to Aeneas (12.90).¹⁵

622 **sanguineam** Paratore notes that while the adjective may seem to foreshadow the terrible violence that will follow, Virgil elected not to make this explicit by associating the word with the sword.¹⁶ Conington expresses some reservation about the artistry of the following *ingentem*.¹⁷

623 **solis inardescit radiis** Servius glosses as a rainbow, which is physically accurate but less ominous than the literal image of a dark cloud glowing red, as in *Argonautica*.¹⁸

624 **electro auroque** The ablative conveys the material from which the greaves are made.

625 **clipei** Augustus was awarded a golden shield in 27BC for his *pietas*, among other virtues.¹⁹ **non enarrabile** “Indescribable”; The material composition of the shield cannot be described, and the description of the scenes cannot be expected to be complete.²⁰ In a light *praeteritio*, Vergil does go on to describe the shield, but the reader is now alerted to the lens of Virgil’s perspective: the description may be flattering to Augustus, but it differs from the complete content of the shield. For Boyle, *non enarrabile* is admitting the problematic aspects of its design, where the overt ideology of Augustan victory coexists with depictions of immorality (8.635, the rape of the Sabine women) and the association of the “barbarian” Cleopatra with the sympathetic Dido (8.709).

textum “Fabric”, and refers here to the intricate workmanship of the surface of the shield, and perhaps the joining of component parts.²¹ The metaphor is from weaving, and so might reference the simile in which Vulcan, rising to craft the weapons he promised in exchange for sex, is rather surprisingly compared to a chaste, widowed weaver rising early to provide for her children (408-15).

626 **illic...illic...** Ecphrasis, the poetic description of art. This scene evokes Homer (*Il.* 18.468-607) but also numerous other authors in Virgil’s library of intertexts.²²

res Italas Romanorumque triumphos Virgil introduces the overarching theme of the shield: Italian affairs and Roman triumphs, merged.

627 **uatum** Fordyce allows for human prophets, while O’Hara opts for gods with prophetic powers.²³

haud uatum ignarus A litotes, in which a denied negative is understood to mean very positive indeed. So: “quite knowledgeable about events to come”.²⁴ Contrast with Aeneas, who examines the shield but is *ignarus* (730).²⁵

¹⁵ Eden, 1975, pg. 162

¹⁶ Paratore, 1978 p. 291

¹⁷ Conington, 1883, p.145

¹⁸ Ramires, 2022, p. 197; see footnote on *quercu* above.

¹⁹ Boyle, 1999, p. 153; O’Hara, 2018, p.99

²⁰ Ramires, 2022, p.197; Boyle, 1999, p. 157; Eden, 1975, p.163

²¹ Conington, 1883, p. 145; Fordyce, 1991, 269-70

²² O’Hara, 2018, p.99 for an overview of authors and literary influences; McKay, 2009 for the rest of the ecphrasis.

²³ Fordyce, 1991, p. 270-1; O’Hara, 2018, p. 101

²⁴ Ramires, 2022, p.198

²⁵ Newman, 2004, p. 37

629 ab Ascanio The Aeneid provides two conflicting accounts of how exactly Aeneas's line continues to Caesar. In this description, we have Ascanius, which agrees with Jupiter's promise to Venus (1.267-74). In Anchises's prophecy, it is via Ascanius's half-brother Silvius (6.763-6).²⁶
pugnata The past participle may be in respect to Virgil's time, or could confirm that the prophecy is true: the wars are *known* to have been fought even at Aeneas's time.²⁷
in ordine Chronological order conveys a sense of growth and expansion.²⁸

²⁶ For inconsistencies in the events portrayed on the shield, see O'Hara, 2018, p.101

²⁷ Fordyce, 1991, p. 271; Fratantuono, 2018, p. 654

²⁸ Hardie, 1986, p.347

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