

Copyright Notice

Staff and students of this University are reminded that copyright subsists in this extract and the work from which it was taken. This Digital Copy has been made under the terms of a CLA Licence which allows you to:

- Access and download a copy
- Print out a copy

This Digital Copy and any digital or printed copy supplied to or made by you under the terms of this Licence are for use in connection with this module or course of study. You may retain such copies after the end of the course, but strictly for your own personal use.

All copies (including electronic copies) shall include this Copyright Notice and shall be destroyed and/or deleted if and when required by the University.

Except as provided for by copyright law, no further copying, storage or distribution (including by e-mail) is permitted without the consent of the copyright holder.

The author (which term includes artists and other visual creators) has moral rights in the work and neither staff nor students may cause, or permit, the distortion, mutilation or other modification of the work, or any other derogatory treatment of it, which would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author.

Title of extract: **A Further Note on Echos of Contemporary History in the Poem**

Name of Author: **Camps, W.A.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): **An introduction to Virgil's Aeneid.**

Camps, W.A.

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable):

Publisher: **Oxford University Press**

Pages scanned: **137 - 143**

Course of Study (Module name and number): **Muses' Playground CLCS5001**

Name of Designated Person

authorising scanning:

E.L. Harris

Date authorised: 05.04.17.

Moodle/Powerpoint

APPENDIX 5

A further note on echoes of contemporary history in the poem

THE facts cited in Chapter 10 make it clear that the narrative of the *Aeneid* is at some points coloured by reminiscence of events in the career of Octavian (or Augustus, as he became in 27 B.C. while Virgil was at work on his poem). It is hardly possible to determine how far this process is carried, and with what degree of intention. But it may be worth while to consider some factors bearing on the question, both in the background and in the evidence of the poem itself.

Virgil had announced in the prologue to his third *Georgic* the intention to make a poem on a grand scale that should honour Octavian down the ages. The great prophetic passages in the first and sixth and eighth books of the *Aeneid* display the historical process begun by Aeneas as culminating in the achievements of Octavian in the poet's own day, and both in these passages and in others we are reminded that Aeneas is also Octavian's ancestor.¹ The restoration of peace and order after the civil wars would naturally ensure to the victor the admiration and affection of the majority who benefited by it. 'After twenty years', wrote one admirer, 'the civil wars were ended, and wars with foreign enemies laid to rest. Peace returned; armed strife and its passions were everywhere stilled; the rule of law was restored . . . the land began to be cultivated again, the worship of the gods to be duly observed, and the individual citizen felt once more secure and safe in the possession of his property' (Velleius Paterculus 2.89). The same feeling is expressed in the last of Horace's *Odes* (4.15) and in more than one passage of the *Aeneid* itself. It is thus not surprising that Octavian should be much in mind in all the *Aeneid*, which was composed in the ten years immediately following the end of the civil wars. This implies no sycophancy or insincerity in the poet, for he and the world had much to be grateful for. Moreover the personal magnetism of Octavian is attested by Suetonius and amply confirmed by Octavian's hold on his soldiers and lieutenants. It appears further from the terms of a letter which the emperor wrote to Virgil from Spain in the year 25 B.C. or thereabouts (see p. 118 above), and from the fact that Virgil joined him

at Athens on his return from the East in 19 B.C.—the occasion of the illness that led to the poet's death—that the relations between the two were more intimate than official. At the same time, neither friendship nor gratitude would oblige the poet to be blind or indifferent to ugly aspects of Octavian's early career which were of common knowledge and regretted later by Octavian himself. 'He was', says a later writer, 'a merciful ruler, if one considers his career from the beginning of his principate', but also 'as a young man he was subject to fits of angry passion, and did many things which it pained him later to recall' (Seneca, *Clementia* 1.9.1 and 11.1).

Against this background it is not surprising that echoes of the person of Octavian and of events in his career should be felt in the *Aeneid*. For just as Virgil's creative imagination works with material drawn from previous literature, with Homer as most immediate and pervasive source, so we might expect it to draw on ideas suggested by history, and especially on the most impressive fact of history in the poet's experience, namely the career of Octavian. That precisely this does in some cases happen we have already seen. The question is of the extent to which it happens.

A convenient method of considering this is by grouping the instances to be examined in two different ways; first with reference to certain extraordinary occasions in Octavian's career, and then again with reference to certain more general aspects of that career which we know were emphasized by his admirers.

One extraordinary occasion was the return of Octavian to Rome in 29 B.C. after he had brought the civil wars to a final conclusion and removed the peril of foreign domination supposed to be represented by the association of Cleopatra with his rival Antony. His triumph on that occasion and the national rejoicing are explicitly introduced in the scene on the shield of Aeneas at the end of the eighth book of the *Aeneid*. But we have seen that reminiscences of the honours paid him then have also coloured the account in the same book of the celebrations in honour of Hercules held by Evander and his Arcadians: the libations, the Salian hymn, the thanksgiving of the people for liberation from a monstrous peril. After the triumph came the dedication of the temple to Octavian's adoptive father Julius, now deified as Divus Julius, and the games in his honour, which included an exhibition of the *Lusus Troiae*. A reminiscence of these (and also of the games held in the same Julius' honour in 44 B.C., when the comet appeared) has, as we have also seen, coloured and perhaps inspired the account of Aeneas' games for

Anchises in the fifth book of the *Aeneid*, with the associated reference to Anchises as *divinus* and promise of the dedication of a temple to him. It is clear that the events of 29 B.C. have left their impression on the *Aeneid* indirectly as well as directly.

Two years later, in 27 B.C., came another extraordinary occasion: the dramatic offer of Octavian to restore the Republic, for which he was honoured with the dedication of the golden shield in the senate-house and the oak-crown fixed for ever above his door. We have seen that the act of Octavian is apparently recalled in the terms of Aeneas' disclaimer of personal ambition at the truce-making in the last book of the *Aeneid*; and that the shield and the oak-crown are very probably recalled in the eighth book in the shield which Venus brings with the rest of the god-made armour and the oak by which she sets them down. There was another striking event which marked the same occasion in 27 B.C., a phenomenal rise of the Tiber which flooded the lower-lying parts of Rome in the night, at the time of Octavian's offer and the decreeing of honours to him on account of it (Dio Cassius, 53.20). It may be that there is a reminiscence of this in the passage, also in the eighth book, in which the Tiber is said (8.86–7) to have stilled his stream 'which all that night had been in spate', in order to afford Aeneas and his men an easy passage to Evander's settlement on the site of future Rome. For else why the particulars about the exceptional spate, when for the river to have checked its flow would have been sufficient for the context? (However, this passage is construed by many editors of Virgil in a different way.)

The events of 29 and 27 B.C. discussed above happened while Virgil was actually working on the *Aeneid*, and it is natural that they should leave their impression. Another set of events that may also have left their impression, for a different reason, occurred in connexion with the war against Sextus Pompeius in 38–6 B.C., about ten years earlier. This war was attended by exceptional hazards for Octavian, whose forces twice suffered defeat in sea-battles and were twice shattered by storm. Similarities have been noted between Appian's account (*Civil War* 5.88–90 and 98–9) of some of these events and passages in the first and fifth books of the *Aeneid*, especially the description of the storm and its sequel in the first book.² Some of these are too general to be conclusive, but they are interesting in the light of the fact that Appian is known to have used the emperor's memoirs, and that the main base of operations for the Caesarian navy was in and about Puteoli, and so in the near neigh-

bourhood of Naples where Virgil commonly resided at this time. The following comparisons may serve for specimens. In Appian 5.98 we read 'Caesar sailed from Puteoli, making sacrifice and libation from the flagship into the sea . . .'; and at *Aeneid* 5.772 ff. 'Aeneas himself stood apart on the prow, holding a cup, and cast the entrails of the victims into the brine and poured libations of sparkling wine'. Again, in Appian 5.117 Octavian and his army, having landed in Sicily, are overtaken by night on their march, 'and there were angry sounds of thunder from Etna and long rumblings and flashes of fire about the army, so that some (of the troops) leaped up in terror, while those who knew about Etna thought that at any minute . . .'; similarly in *Aeneid* 3.583 ff. it is said of the Trojans near Etna that 'we took shelter in the woods and all that night long suffered fearful terrors, and could not tell what made the noise'. Again, Suetonius (*Aug.* 16) mentions that just before the final sea-fight Octavian was 'suddenly overpowered' by sleep, like Palinurus in the extraordinary episode at the end of the fifth book of the *Aeneid*. In all of these instances the scene or event is remarkable, and the presence of it in the *Aeneid* not due to anything in the legend or in known literary precedent, whereas an obviously possible source is reminiscence of events of the war of 38–36 B.C. But if we suppose that such reminiscence has in fact supplied material here to Virgil's imagination, it does not seem likely that this was intended by the poet to have an evocative effect, as may well have been the case with the events of 29 and 27 B.C. Similarly Virgil's reminiscences of Homer are sometimes clearly intended to evoke a memory of a Homeric passage, but sometimes have done no more than provide part of the raw material out of which the poet's imagination constructs his story.

Turning to more general aspects of the question, one may note that the figure of Hercules in Book 8 is evocative of qualities of Octavian additional to those noted above. Hercules and Octavian are both 'saviours' (8.189 *servati*; Propertius 4.6.37 *mundi servator*), and qualified for divinity (8.301 *decus addite divis*; Georg. 1.24 *tu . . . quem mox quae sint habitura deorum concilia incertum est*), as also is Aeneas (12.794 *Aenean scis . . . deberi caelo* etc.). And when Aeneas comes to enter Evander's modest dwelling on the Palatine, he is exhorted by his host to be content like Hercules before him with its simplicity and so 'to make yourself deserving of godhead' (8.364 *te quoque dignum finge deo*). There can be no doubt that these words in this setting not only suggest the prospective deification of Aeneas, and of Octavian, but also recall the simplicity of Octavian-Augustus' living arrange-

ments, remarked on by Suetonius (*Aug.* 72–3); 'he lived on the Palatine, but still in the modest house which had belonged to Hortensius, remarkable neither for size or ornamentation . . . the plainness of the furniture can still be observed . . . simpler if anything than that of a private citizen'. Again, when Aeneas is saluted (8.513) by Evander as (*Teucrum atque*) *Italum fortissime ductor*, the wording seems to echo Octavian's claim, recorded in the *Res Gestae* (25), that *tota Italia . . . me . . . ducem depoposcit*. Again, the inspiration afforded to Aeneas by the spirit of his dead father (6.806 *et dubitamus adhuc virtutem extendere factis, aut metus Ausonia prohibet consistere terra?*) corresponds to the inspiration drawn by Octavian from his adoptive father Julius (Vell. Pat. 2.60.2 ' . . . declaring that it would be intolerable that he should not think himself worthy of the name that Caesar had thought him worthy of'). Again, the words with which Anchises greets Aeneas at their meeting in the underworld—*et tua demum vicit iter durum pietas?*—repeat (though in a very different context) the admiration of Caesar for the courage and energy his nephew showed in following him to Spain in 45 B.C. (Suet. *Aug.* 8 *avunculum . . . per infestas hostibus vias subsecutus magno opere demeruit, approbata cito etiam morum indole super itineris industriam*). Examples could be multiplied.

Considering the evident reminiscences of Octavian's regard for his adoptive father in the filial piety of Aeneas towards Anchises, not only in some of the above examples but also and more specifically in the episode of the funeral games in Book 5, one might expect an allusion in the *Aeneid* to the motive which Octavian claimed was dominant with him in all the early years of his career, namely, to avenge Julius Caesar's death. 'He thought it his first duty to avenge the death of his (great-)uncle (and adoptive father)' says Suetonius (*Aug.* 10), and so too Ovid: 'this was Caesar's first duty, his first undertaking in manhood, to avenge his father's death with righteous arms' (*Fasti*, 3.709). The expectation of an allusion to this is increased by the fact that the war in Italy in the last half of the *Aeneid* reflects in some respects the civil wars of Rome. And in fact the allusion is present, in the vengeance Aeneas seeks and takes on Turnus for the death of his friend Pallas. This corresponds evidently enough to the vengeance taken by Achilles in the *Iliad* on Hector for the death of Patroclus. And it is made an allusion to the vengeance of Octavian on the murderers of Caesar by the fact that Octavian was known to have quoted the words of Achilles in the *Iliad* (18.98–9) to those who counselled caution to him after Caesar's death: 'may I

die here and now, since I failed my friend and was not there to save him when he fell', and he went on to declare that Caesar was not only friend to him but comrade in arms and commander as well (Appian, *Civil War*, 3.3). Thus Caesar the father is represented in the *Aeneid* by Anchises, and Caesar the fallen friend and comrade in arms is represented by Pallas. And in this must lie the explanation of the savagery of Aeneas after the death of Pallas (pp. 28-9 above), in accord with the primitive fury of an Achilles to be sure, but strangely discordant with the normally disciplined humanity of Aeneas. For Seneca says, it will be remembered, that Octavian was 'a mild and humane ruler, if one judges by his conduct in his principate; but as a young man he yielded to passion at times and did many things which he did not care to think of afterwards'. It was believed (Suet. *Aug.* 15), rightly or not, that after the fall of Perusia in 41 B.C. he caused three hundred knights and senators to be slaughtered like sacrificial victims at an altar erected in honour of the dead Julius. It is difficult to understand the act of Aeneas in taking and sending prisoners to be sacrificed at Pallas' funeral, except in the light of this story. The precedent of Achilles' similar act in the *Iliad* (21.27 ff. and 23. 175-6) will not alone account for it; for human sacrifice is called by Livy 'un-Roman', and Aeneas is conceived in general by Virgil as humane by nature as well as controlled by self-discipline.

It will be seen from this that the allusions to contemporary events and persons in the *Aeneid* do not follow a consistent pattern of equivalences. Octavian is suggested sometimes by Aeneas, sometimes by Hercules. Julius Caesar is recalled in some aspects by Anchises, father of the hero, sometimes by Pallas his slain friend. This is not far different from the way in which the reflections of Homeric characters in the *Aeneid* shift and combine. Turnus reflects now Achilles, now Hector. Aeneas reflects now the Homeric Aeneas, now the Homeric Achilles. Virgil's mind in relation to history and to literary precedent alike is less like a mirror than a kaleidoscope. Yet this may be an over-simplification and it may be that the person of Aeneas, though not a mirror image of Octavian, is a nearer reflection than has been implied above. Dio Cassius in his account of the history of this period, written it is true two centuries later, puts in the mouth of Octavian on the occasion of his professed offer to restore the republic in 27 B.C. a speech which though fictitious may well go back in its outline to a contemporary version, perhaps from Livy. A part of it (D.C. 53.4) runs as follows: '... that the facts themselves may

satisfy you that I had no desire for supreme power on my own account, but that in very truth my object was to avenge the wicked murder of my father and to save the state from the great evils which then continually beset it. For I would far rather that the commonwealth had never had need of me for this, but that we like our forebears could have dwelt in peace and concord with one another . . . But since Destiny, as it seems, brought it about that you should have need of me, young still though I then was, . . . I let nothing deter me from coming to your aid in your time of peril, not weariness, nor fear, nor the threats of enemies, nor the entreaties of friends, nor the number of those leagued against us, nor the desperate fury of our adversaries, but I set myself unsparingly to brave every hazard, and I did and suffered those things of which you know.' In the same historian's version of the funeral speech pronounced over the emperor by his successor Tiberius it is said (D.C. 56.53) that in the civil wars 'he did and suffered not what he himself desired but what was willed by the power that rules the world'. The picture here of a man who was agent of destiny, who had no personal ambitions, who endured for the good of his country great labours and great perils, undeterred by the appeals of friends and undismayed by the number and desperate fury of his adversaries, might be an account of the hero of the *Aeneid*, even in the implied acknowledgement of some acts that he regretted. It may be therefore that in outline the character of Aeneas in the *Aeneid* is in fact drawn from Virgil's conception of that of Octavian-Augustus. But about this we can only speculate, for we do not know what lies behind the speech in Dio.