GIAN BIA GIO CONTE

LATIN LITERATURE

A HISTORY

TRANSLATED BY JOSEPH B. SOLODOW

REVISED BY DON FOWLER & GLENN W. MOST
Publius Vergilius Maro was born near Mantua—the precise location is controversial—on 15 October 70 B.C., to small landholders. The places of his education must have been Rome and Naples, though the whole chronology of his youth is debated. An especially interesting notice is found in a short poem attributed to Virgil, the fifth of the collection *Catalepton* (see p. 431): allusion is made to a school that the young Virgil had attended in Naples, conducted by the Epicurean philosopher Siro. The value of the notice is debated, since the poem, as far as its quality goes, could be the work of a young Virgil, but by the same token the autobiographical content could also derive from a forger eager to fill a vacuum in the career of the young poet. Still, the first work Virgil certainly wrote, the *Bucolics*, clearly shows familiarity with Epicureanism.

The dating of the *Bucolics* is fairly secure, on the whole, but it is tied to an episode that is not altogether clear. Several times in the work Virgil alludes to the perilous events of 41, when the country around Mantua suffered great land confiscations, which were intended to recompense the veterans of the battle of Philippi. The period is marked by serious disorders, and Virgil reflects the tragedy of the dispossessed peasants. A notice originating in the classical period and greatly elaborated by the ancient commentators on Virgil has it that Virgil himself had lost his family farm in the confiscations and had then gotten it back. Through whose intervention? The ancient notices are not clear on this point. Octavian has been suggested, as have other people directly mentioned in the *Bucolics*, all somehow involved in the administration of the Transpadane territory: Asinius Pollio, Cornelius Gallus, and Alfenus Varus, the first two known as men of culture, among other things. Around the original nucleus of the notice a biographical fiction was later formed, involving the allegorical interpretation of many passages of the *Bucolics*; today it is very difficult to disentangle any underlying truth.

It is certain, however, that the *Bucolics* show no trace of Maecenas, who would be Virgil's great friend and patron. At the same time, the protecting figure of Pollio, who would later disappear altogether from Virgil's work, is of considerable importance. Immediately after the publication of the
Virgil joins the circle of Maecenas’s intimates, and thus Octavian’s too. Shortly after, Horace also joins. During the long years of uncertainty and political strife before the battle of Actium (31 B.C.), Virgil is at work on the refined composition of his agricultural poem, in full harmony with the circle of Maecenas. He seems, however, not to have liked Rome: the end of the *Georgics* speaks of Naples as a beloved place of retirement and literary activity.

All of Virgil’s life, as far as we know it, is extraordinarily lacking in external events and is centered instead on unremitting toil over poetry. In 29 Octavian, returning victorious from the East, stops at Atella, in Campania, and has Virgil read to him the *Georgics*, which he had scarcely finished. There are, however, somewhat controversial indications that place the actual publication of the poem a little earlier (see p. 269). From here onwards the poet was entirely absorbed in the composition of the *Aeneid*. It seems that Augustus followed the development of the work with great personal interest, as we learn from a fragment of a letter. Virgil lived long enough to read some parts of the poem to the princeps but not long enough to regard the work as finished; it seems that scruples, second thoughts, and revisions were typical of his character and his method of composing. The *Aeneid* was published at Augustus’s behest by Varius Rufus: the poet had died on 21 September 19 B.C. at Brundisium, on returning from a voyage to Greece. Virgil was buried at Naples. The literary success of the work, which had already been awaited and heralded in literary circles before 19, was immediate and such as to establish it forever.

*Bucolics*, ten brief poems in hexameters (going from a minimum of 63 verses to a maximum of 111, for a total of 829 hexameters), also called *Eclogues*, written between 42 and 39 (the chronology of the individual poems is much debated); *Georgics*, a didactic poem in four books of hexameters (each book containing slightly more than 500 verses, a total of 2188), completed in 29; the *Aeneid*, an epic poem in twelve books, in the meter appropriate to the genre, the hexameter (the books containing between 700 and 950 verses apiece, for a total of a just under 10,000). The last work was published by the executors of his will. Some instances of incongruence and narrative repetition remain, signs that the final touches are missing; the most obvious signs of incompleteness are the 58 unfinished verses, which Virgil himself called *sibicins*, “props” to support a building under construction. The poetic texts known collectively as the *Appendix Vergiliana* are mostly spurious (see pp. 430 ff.); only a couple of the poems from the collection *Catalepton* have a fair probability of being authentic, and, if they are, they belong to his youthful writings.

Apart from the evidence to be gotten from the genuine texts, we have a series of late ancient and medieval *Vitae* in which a nucleus goes back to Suetonius’s biographical activity (see pp. 547 ff.) and therefore deserves the greatest consideration. The most famous of these *Vitae* is owed to Aelius
The poet world

donatus, the great gramian of the fourth century (see pp. 627 f.). All the genuine works are amply commented on beginning in the first century A.D.; among the preserved texts the commentary of Servius (fourth–fifth century) is particularly important, since it contains historical information, of varying value.

I. THE BUCOLICS

Theocritus and Virgil

Until the publication of Virgil's Bucolics, Theocritus was the least popular and least successful among the great Hellenistic authors read by the Romans. His world, at the same time simple, delicate, and artificial, was not perhaps the one most apt to seize the imagination of the poetae novi. His poetics did not lend themselves to manifestoes of innovation and experimentation. The new Roman culture, so strongly urban, preferred to turn to other models. Curiously, Theocritus had been, in his way, a poet of the city, indeed of the metropolis. The poetry of the Idylls looks to the nostalgic and learned reconstruction of a traditional pastoral world, a sight intended for the taste of an urbanized, cosmopolitan public and a court society. Settings such as Sicily and the distant island of Cos serve Theocritus as backdrops for his drama of shade and shadow. A strong Doric veneer helps to distance the poetic language. Shepherds were the protagonists of the action, and along with them a rich but static countryside, with everything suspended in an everyday existence that is rarefied, yet brightened by poetry. The material offered by the new genre is less monotonous than it seems: it can also treat large themes, but it does so, of necessity, in a simple and remote way. The sophisticated public of the city can admire in every detail the delicate balance between poetic learning and a taste for description of the particular.

The coming together of Virgil and this genre, which is also a world of imagination, was extremely fortunate. The young poet possessed a great store of feelings, and in Theocritus he read the rural world in which he had grown up. Touches of realism and of nostalgia were part of the poetic formula of this genre. Yet he was moved in the direction of Theocritus by a strong sense of literature, a tendency towards self-reflection. The shepherd-poets of the Idylls readily presented themselves to him as possibilities for investigating, obliquely, an entire literary vocation. Imitating Theocritus signifies, ultimately, a kind of symbiosis that is without precedent in Roman literature, and even perhaps, as far as intensity goes, one that is without real followers. Virgil did not limit himself to knowing thoroughly the Theocritean corpus and, probably, the minor bucolic poets of the second and first centuries and the commentators on Theocritus. He transported himself to within this literary genre and learned to observe its principles in a foreign language. The result cannot be reduced to a simple process of imitation. No single Virgilian eclogue stands in a one-to-one
defeating the natural law of death. The other civilizing hero points to a different path. Aristaëus, who in the mythic tradition "invents" hunting, the curdling of milk, the collection of honey, and so on, shows that the patient struggle against nature is maintained by a stubborn obedience to divine guidance and leads to the regeneration of the bees. In this way the narrative digression, allusively and by alteration of the myth, illuminates the substance of the didactic message and in turn is illuminated by it. Without prescribing a solution, Virgil allows his account to be pervaded by the contrast between different models of life.

4. FROM THE GEORGICS TO THE AENEID

The experience of the Georgics permits Virgil to think large without abandoning the requirements of the new poetics. The poem orchestrates a large diversity of themes, organizing them into a continuous whole, without neglecting thereby the refinement of the form. At the same time, Virgil enhances the subjective nature of his style. When describing, or when narrating, as in the miniature epic of Aristaëus, the poet immerses objects and persons in his subjective participation, or rather he immerses himself, for a moment, in the perspective of other subjects. He describes and narrates without rejecting emotion.

The expectation of a new epic was strong in Augustan culture. The poet who in the Bucolics refused to sing of reges et proelia (6.3) now is willing to accept this burden, but he brings a new sensibility with him. In the proem at the middle of the Georgics he gives us to understand that he is even willing to sing the deeds of Augustus (3.46-48). The Ennian tradition, which was opposed by the poetae novi, had never been altogether extinguished, but epic served for the most part to celebrate contemporary achievements. The people of Virgil's day thus must have been inclined to expect a kind of new Caesareid. The actual result could not have failed to astonish them.

5. THE AENEID

Homer and Augustus (I)

The new epic in fact did not propose to continue Ennius, but to replace him; thus a direct confrontation with Homer was inevitable. According to the ancient grammarians, the purpose of the Aeneid was twofold: to imitate Homer and to praise Augustus, "beginning with his ancestors." A first glance at the work shows that this is a reasonable simplification. The twelve books are conceived primarily as a response to the forty-eight books of the two Homeric poems.

The first six books of the Aeneid recount Aeneas's difficult voyage from Carthage to the shores of Latium, with a retrospective review of the events that had brought him from Troy to Carthage. With the beginning of book 7 the Trojans have arrived at the mouth of the Tiber, the place indicated by destiny, and there begins the narrative of a war (dicam acies, "I shall sing
of battles" (7.42)) that will end only with the death of Turnus in the last verse of book 12. For this reason it is common to talk of an "Odyssean" half of the Aeneid (1-6) and an "Iliadic" half (7-12). This refers to a great structural partition, undoubtedly intended by the poet. This does not mean that there will not be instances of the Odyssey's influencing the latter part of the poem or of the Iliad's influencing the earlier part, but if we look at the great lines of Virgil's project, the basic choice is evident. The Iliad tells of the events that lead to the destruction of a city; the Odyssey narrates, as a sequel to this war, the return home of one of the destroyers. These two epic stories, these fabulae, are represented by Virgil in reverse sequence: first the voyages, then the war. But this arrangement involves an inversion of the contents as well. Aeneas's voyage is not a returning home like Odysseus's; it is basically a voyage towards the unknown. The war waged by Aeneas does not serve to destroy a city, but to construct a new city, which will be the ancestor of Rome. This complex transformation of the Homeric models has no precedent in ancient poetry. Apollonius of Rhodes had to some extent "contaminated" narrative sequences drawn from both Homeric poems, and Naevius's Bellum Poenicum appears to have been indebted to the Odyssey for Aeneas's voyage and to the Iliad for the narratives of war, but in each case we are dealing only with a remote impetus (on Naevius see p. 46).

For convenience, one might distinguish different levels of transformation. First, the Aeneid, as we have seen, is a particular contamination of the two Homeric poems. Second, there is also a continuation of Homer. Aeneas's deeds follow upon the Iliad (Virgil's book 2 recounts the last night of Troy, which in the Iliad was glimpsed only in prophecy) and link up with the Odyssey (in book 3 Aeneas partly follows the track of Odysseus's adventures, meeting perils that the Greek hero had already come across). In this way Virgil repeats the experience of the epic cycle, the chain of epic narratives that combined Homer's poetry into a sort of continuum.

Third, the Aeneid includes within itself a sort of Homeric repetition. For instance, the war in Latium is often viewed as a repetition of the war at Troy, but it is certainly not a merely passive echoing. At the start the Trojans find themselves besieged and near defeat, as if they were condemned to repeat their destiny. In the end, however, the Trojans are victorious, and Aeneas slays his chief opponent, Turnus, as Achilles slays Hector: in the new Iliad the Trojans are victorious. But it is easy to see that the repeating is also a surpassing of Homer. The war, through struggles and sufferings, will lead, not to destruction, but to the construction of a new unity. In the end, Aeneas contains in himself the victorious Achilles and especially Odysseus, who after so many attempts retakes his country and restores peace.

This brings us to Virgil's other intention: "to praise Augustus, beginning with his ancestors." Virgil's poem is separated from the Augustan present by an almost astronomical distance. The ancients placed an interval of about four centuries between the destruction of Troy and the foundation of Rome. The events of the Aeneid are treated as historical, although, tech-
Homeric narrative techniques and Augustan Rome

nically speaking, they do not belong to Roman history. Virgil's Roman readers find themselves in the midst of a Homeric world, removed from the familiar present by a legendary space of more than a thousand years.

This displacement permits Virgil to regard the world of Augustus from a distance, just as in the Georgics the displacement towards the historyless world of the countryside allowed the poet a broader and more detached perspective. The Aeneid is full of prophetic passages that give an Augustan orientation to the story, but it does not thereby cease to be Homeric.

The narrative techniques that allow Virgil to regard Augustan Rome from a distance are in fact Homeric. In the Iliad Zeus prophesies the destiny of the heroes and the destruction of Troy. In the Aeneid (1.257–96 and elsewhere) Jupiter safeguards not only Aeneas's destiny but also the future greatness of Augustus, who in the end will bring back the Golden Age. In the Odyssey Odysseus descends to Hades and obtains a vision of his own destiny. In the Aeneid Aeneas learns from the kingdom of the dead not only of his personal future but also of the great moments in Rome's history (6.756–886). In the Iliad, the poem of warrior might, the description of Achilles' shield introduces a sort of cosmic vision (scenes of nature, city images). In the Aeneid the description of Aeneas's shield is crowned by the image of the city of Rome, caught in the critical moments of its historical development (8.626–728). Thus a difficult balance is attempted between the tradition of the heroic epic and the need for a historical-celebratory epic.

The Legend of Aeneas

The point of intersection between the Homeric dimension and the Augustan dimension was given to Virgil by an old legend. Ancient Italy knew a series of foundation legends tied to the Trojan War. Heroes of the Greek side and the Trojan, disbanded or in exile, are said to be the founders, or the colonizers, of Italian places. Among these stories the legend of Aeneas acquired particular significance in a long process that extended from the fourth to the second century B.C. In Homer he was an important, but not a principal, Trojan hero, his house seeming destined to rule over Troy after the extinction of Priam's line (Iliad 20.307 ff.). Later, however, Aeneas's flight from burning Troy with his father Anchises on his back became popular in figurative art as well as in literature. A link was soon established with ancient Latium: on one side, a Greek literary tradition worked in this direction; on another, as recent archaeological discoveries have shown, the cult of Aeneas as founder-hero is attested at Lavinium, south of Rome, from the fourth century onwards.

It does not appear that Aeneas was ever regarded as the founder of Rome or that he had a particular cult in archaic Rome. From the second to the first century, however, the figure of Aeneas acquired growing fame among the Romans. The reasons are political and not easy to disentangle. Chiefly, the myth of the Trojan origin of the Romans drew support from Aeneas; the most noble Trojan hero to have escaped from the catastrophe
would thus be connected by genealogy with Romulus, the founder of the city. This permitted Roman culture to claim a kind of independent equality with the Greeks precisely at the time when Rome was securing hegemony over the Greek Mediterranean. The Trojans were confirmed as great antagonists of the Greeks by the Homeric myth. Their revenge would be carried out by Rome. (The third great power of the Mediterranean, Carthage, was also opportunistically linked to the legend of Aeneas through its queen Dido.) Rome thus legitimized its new power by means of a deep historical background. Another factor in Aeneas's popularity depends on a circumstance of internal politics. Through the figure of Aeneas's son Ascanius/Iulus, the gens Iulia, a noble Roman family, claimed very noble origins for itself. A member of this clan, Julius Caesar, and later his adoptive son Octavian Augustus found themselves masters of Rome's worldwide empire. Here, then, the circle is formed that joins together Virgil, Augustus, and the epic hero.

The Aeneid traces the legend of Aeneas from the last day of Troy up to Aeneas's victory and the fusion of Trojans and Latins into a single people. The plan of the work is as follows:

Book 1. Juno cannot forget her hatred towards what remains of the Trojan people. A storm, provoked by the goddess, shatters Aeneas's ships and compels him to put ashore in Africa, near Carthage. Aided by his mother Venus, the hero finds a warm welcome with the queen of the Phoenician city, the widow Dido. The queen, also an exile, asks her guest to recount the end of Troy.

Book 2. Aeneas's account: during the destruction of the city the hero, with divine protection, succeeds in fleeing along with his aged father, his little son, and the penates, the symbol of a race's continuity; his wife Creusa, however, is lost to him.

Book 3. Aeneas's account: leaving the Troad, the Trojans realize, after various uncertainties and puzzlements, that a new country awaits them in the west. After describing several miraculous happenings, the retrospective account concludes with the death of the aged Anchises.

Book 4. The tragic story of Dido's love. The Carthaginian queen, abandoned by Aeneas, who must follow the course intended by fate, kills herself, cursing Aeneas and prophesying eternal hatred between Carthage and the descendants of the Trojans.

Book 5. The Trojans make a stop in Sicily. Nearly the whole book is taken up with the funeral games in honor of Anchises.

Book 6. Arriving at Cumae, in Campania, Aeneas is obliged to consult the Sibyl and to gain access to the world of the dead. There he meets persons from his past: Deiphobus, fallen at Troy, Dido, dead on his account, the unfortunate pilot Palinurus, and especially his father Anchises. Anchises reveals to him the distant future. The world of the dead contains the heroes of the future too, the leaders who will make Roman history.

Book 7. Strengthened by this vision and by his father's advice, Aeneas disembarks at the mouth of the Tiber and, on the basis of signs foretold, recognizes the promised land. He now makes a pact with king Latinus. Juno launches Allecto, the
From what we know of the historical-antiquarian sources used by Virgil, it is evident that the poet has thoroughly restructured the traditional data about Aeneas’s arrival in Latium. The varying notices about a war with the Latins, or with a part of them, followed by the formation of an alliance, have been fused into a new, single war sequence, concluded by a historic conciliation. The war has been represented by Virgil as an encounter between Trojans and Latins. The latter form a coalition with numerous Italian peoples, many of whom, significantly, boast Greek ancestry; the former form a coalition with the Etruscans and with a small Greek population settled on the soil of the future Rome. In the effort to create a true Roman national epic, Virgil sets in motion, already in the period of the origins, all the great forces from which “modern” Italy will be born. No people is completely excluded from making a positive contribution to the genesis of Rome. The Latins themselves, after many sacrifices, will be reconciled and
The Aeneid is not a historical poem

The Aeneid is thus a work of dense historical and political significance; it is not, however, a historical poem. The contents are dictated by a selection of the material according to a dramatic principle that recalls Homer more than Ennius. Despite the expectations aroused by the title, the work does not even draw a complete picture of Aeneas's life. We take leave of the protagonist before he can savor his triumph; it is not even quite clear whether he will live for much longer, and his future as a deified hero is glanced at only obliquely.

The New Epic Style

The newest and greatest quality of Virgilian epic style lies in the reconciliation of the maximum of freedom with the maximum of order (as the German scholar Friedrich Klingner was wont to say).

Virgil labored over the epic meter, the hexameter, bringing it to a culmination of both regularity and flexibility. The neoterics had established tight restrictions on the use of the caesuras, the alternation of dactyls and spondees, and the relation between syntax and meter. Catullus's poem 64 represents an extreme case of this, an extreme reaction to the rhythmic-verbal "anarchy" of the archaic poetry, a reaction naturally influenced by the formal discipline of the Alexandrians. This discipline involved an effect of monotony, which becomes more pronounced as the narrative text becomes longer. The placement of the words is not merely artificial but also rigidly fixed (hexameters formed by two adjective-noun pairs symmetrically placed are typical) and the rhythmic unity of the verse rejects clear sense pauses within the line, with a resulting effect of almost unbending rigidity.

Virgil shapes his hexameter to be the vehicle of a long, continuous narration, articulated and varied. The rhythmic structure of the verse is based on a limited number of principal caesuras in certain preferred configurations. Thus a fundamental regularity is established that is indispensable to the epic style. At the same time, the combination of principal caesuras and secondary caesuras permits a notable variety of sequences. And the phrase is thereby set free from any slavish fixity in relation to the meter. The periods may be large or small; they may cross the boundaries of the metrical units or coincide with them. The hexameter thus adapts itself to a variety of expressive situations: broad, calm descriptions, or aroused and pathetic exchanges. The rhythm of the narration finds a formal reflex in the varying proportion of dactyls and spondees. Alliteration, a formal device characteristic of archaic Latin poetry, in Virgil becomes a controlled, motivated device that emphasizes pathetic moments, links key words with one another, creates phonetic symbolism, and produces echoes between different points in the narrative.
The traditions of the epic genre required an elevated language, removed from everyday usage. Thus it is natural that the *Aeneid* is the Virgilian work richest in archaisms and poeticisms, two categories that often coincide, but not always. Some of the archaisms pay homage to Ennius’s style or to the strong expressiveness of early tragedy. Others simply form part of the established literary language. Poeticisms that are not archaic are, for instance, the calques from Greek or the neologisms. On the whole, however, this is not the most significant feature of the Virgilian style. A contemporary, cited in the Donatian life of Virgil (sec. 44), said that Virgil had invented a new *cacozelia*, a new “mannerism”: “a mannerism that was elusive, neither swollen, nor thin, but made up of ordinary words.” Ordinary words—a large percentage of the Virgilian vocabulary consists of terms not conspicuously poetic, “neutral” words, so to speak, employed in prose and the language of everyday usage (i.e., the Latin spoken at Rome by the educated classes). Virgil tends to avoid Grecisms, archaisms, and novel literary formations, which, though differing in their origins, are functionally alike in being opposed to this medium level of the language. Instead, the novelty consists in new junctures among words. *Recentem caede locum,* “a place fresh with slaughter”; *tela exit,* “he leaves the missiles (dodges them)”; *frontem rugis arat,* “plows the forehead with wrinkles”; *caeso sanguine,* “blood slain” (i.e., “of the slain”); *flumen,* “stream (of tears that flow)”; *ventis dare vela,* “to give the sails to the wind”; *lux aena,* “light of bronze.” Some of these junctures are familiar to us, in part because of Virgil’s strong influence upon the Western literary tradition, but they must have struck the Roman reader as the revelation of new possibilities for the language. Others are more difficult to translate because they do violence to sense and syntax: *rumpit vocem,* not “breaks the voice” but “breaks the silence”; *eripe fugam,* “snatch away flight,” based on the normal *se eripere,* “escape.” This type of development of the everyday language has no precedents in Latin poetry; one thinks rather of Sophocles or Euripides. The experimentation with syntax operates with a vocabulary that remains simple and direct. In its effects, however, it proves to be a renewal; the words undergo a process of distancing that gives importance and a new perceptibility to the meaning in context.

The new epic style can also adapt itself to a series of traditional requirements. From Homer onwards, narrative is supposed to be gradual and without intervening gaps, “full,” so to speak. Recurring, repeated actions lend themselves to verbal repetitions. Fixed, natural epithets accompany objects and persons, almost as if to fix their place in the world. The numbers of warriors and of ships, the names of the characters, the origins of objects are all elements to be catalogued with precision. Virgil accepts this tradition: the *Aeneid*, unlike his other writings, gives much space to formulaic procedures.

Virgil tends to preserve these forms and at the same time to charge them with new sensibility. The epithets, for example, tend to involve the reader in the situation, often even in the psychology of the persons of the action.
The subjective style and the intervention of the poet

The ideological subjectivity of the Aeneid

The narrative suggests more than what it says explicitly. For instance, in 1.469-71 Aeneas is looking at the pictures recording the tragic war at Troy. Among other scenes is Diomedes carrying out a nocturnal massacre:

niveis tentoria velis
adgnoscit lacrimans, primo quae prodita somno
Tydides multa vastabat caede cruentus.

("Aeneas, weeping, recognizes the snowy-white canvas of the tents, betrayed by the first sleep, and Diomedes laying waste to them, bloodied with slaughter"). The reader perceives the intense white of the tents only to see them stained with blood; the red of the bloodshed is not openly stated by the text but is contained entirely in the epithet *cruentus*. And the perception of these details intensifies his participation in the state of Aeneas's soul, the more intensely as the reader must collaborate, make the hints explicit, fill in the empty blanks.

The fundamental characteristic of Virgil's epic style is thus the increase of subjectivity. Greater initiative is given to the reader, who should respond to the stimuli, to the characters, whose point of view colors the narrated action at times, and to the narrator, who is present at several levels of the story. This increase of subjectivity would run the risk of breaking down the structure were it not checked in a number of ways. Objectivity is secured by the presence of the poet, who allows the individual subjective points of view to emerge in the text but is always responsible for recomposing them into a unitary project. To recognize and study the complexity of the style means to touch the very complexity of the ideological discourse that takes shape in the *Aeneid*.

Homer and Augustus (II): The Motives of the Defeated

The development of subjectivity, which in a very schematic way one could contrast with Homeric objectivity, concerns not only the epic style and the technique of narrative but also the ideology of Virgil's poem. The *Aeneid* is the story of a mission willed by fate that would make possible the foundation of Rome and its salvation by Augustus. The poet is the guarantor and spokesman of this project, and he focuses his account on Aeneas, the bearer of this fated mission. (It is obvious therefore why Aeneas is not a character like the others.) Thus Virgil fully assumes the legacy of the Roman historical epic: his poem is a national epic, in which a collectivity needs to reflect itself and feel itself united.

And yet there is more to the *Aeneid* than this undertaking. Below the objective line willed by fate, characters move about in conflict with one another; the narrative adapts itself to contemplating the conflicting motives. The feelings of the characters (not only the "positive" characters such as Aeneas) are constantly in the foreground.

Take Dido, for example. Roman culture in the period of the conquests represented the Punic Wars as an encounter between different parties. Roman identity was based on the great opposition to Carthage. The enemy
is treacherous, cruel, fond of luxury, devoted to perverse rites. For Virgil, however, the war with Carthage does not arise from difference: back at the time of its origins, the war arises from an excessive and tragic love between parties who are similar. Dido is defeated by destiny, as Carthage will be, but the text makes a place for her motives and transmits them.

This is also the case with Turnus. The war that Aeneas wages in Latium is not viewed as a necessary sacrifice. The peoples divided by the war are from the very beginning substantially similar and kindred to one another. To emphasize this point, Virgil even maintains that the Trojans, through their ancestor Dardanus, have Italian origins; in this sense Aeneas, too, like Odysseus, is one who returns. The war is a tragic error willed by demoniacal powers. It is in effect a fratricidal war (this is an incessant theme in the Aeneid even before it is in Neronian and Flavian poetry). The slaying of Turnus, prepared for by the death of Pallas, appears necessary. Turnus, disarmed and wounded, asks for pity. Aeneas has learned from his father to beat down the proud and to spare the one who submits. Turnus is a proud hero, but now he is also subiectus. The choice is difficult. Aeneas kills him only because at that crucial moment the sight of Pallas’s sword belt overwhelms him in a fit of deadly anger. Thus, in the final scene of the story the pious Aeneas resembles the terrifying Achilles who takes his revenge upon Hector. The Iliad, however, ends with a pitying Achilles who finds himself no different from Priam.

It is clear that Virgil demands a great deal of his readers. They must simultaneously appreciate the fated necessity of the victory and remember the motives of the defeated; look at the world from a high perspective (Jupiter, fate, the omniscient narrator) and share in the sufferings of the individuals; accept both epic objectivity, which from on high contemplates the great providential cycle of history, and tragic subjectivity, the quarrel of individual motives and relative truths. At this level, too, and not only at the level of style, Virgil shows he has profoundly pondered the lesson of the Greek tragedians, from whose influence his poem derives a very marked openness to the problematic elements in life, which renders it different from a typical national epic. In this light it is easy to understand why the reception of the work has remained vital and problematic long after the passing away of its Augustan message.

6. LITERARY SUCCESS

Virgil’s Nachleben is Western literature. Virgil disliked publicity and cultivated a difficult Muse, but in vain. Anecdotal evidence suggests that already during his lifetime he was regarded not only by professional colleagues but also by many lay readers as Rome’s greatest living poet; and the grammarian Caecilius Epitomae had made him a school author by about 25 B.C., even before his crowning work, the Aeneid, had been published. At the time of his death Virgil left instructions that that epic, unfinished and (perhaps only for this reason) unsatisfactory, be burned—again in vain.
Antiquity

Augustus entrusted its publication to Varius, and it went on to become one of the central literary works of Western culture. Perhaps it is only with regard to Virgil that T. S. Eliot could begin a lecture entitled "What is a Classic?" by asserting as something obvious that "whatever the definition we arrive at, it cannot be one that excludes [him]—we may say confidently that it must be one which will expressly reckon with him." For Virgil, almost despite himself, became a European classic. Like his hero Aeneas, he rescued his idols from historical oblivion by betraying them, by transporting them, with considerable reluctance and many a backward glance, to a new domain, where he laid the foundation for a new cultural and political empire that he would not live to experience and that in many regards would have profoundly troubled him.

For the Romans, with a speed and completeness that has few parallels in world literature, Virgil had already become a classic. His works are quoted so often in antiquity that even if they had been lost, they could still be reconstructed in large measure. During his own lifetime, fellow poets such as Horace and Propertius admired him, from a distance, and parodies of his works flourished (Numitorius already composed *Antibucolica* in protest against his earliest poems), but apparently no poet earlier than Ovid dared to try to rival him. Very early he became a model author for grammarians (Caecilius Epirota; C. Julius Hyginus, the head of the Palatine Library) and for rhetors (thus already during the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius, on the testimony of Seneca the Elder), and throughout antiquity he remained one of the fundamental school texts (replacing republican epic poets such as Ennius and thereby condemning their works to full or partial destruction); one surviving papyrus transmits *Georg.* 4.1–2 written six times, another *Aeneid* 2.601 written seven times. But such scholarly attentions could be directed not only to admiring the beauties of his art. Such *obstructores Vergili* as Herennius, Carbilius Pictor, Q. Octavius, and Perellius Faustus wrote polemical tractates with titles such as *Aeneidomastix* (modeled on the Greek *Homeromastix*) and *Homoiotetes* in which, misunderstanding the character of Virgil's profound traditionality, they attempted to demonstrate his lack of originality by collecting what they called his *furta*, thefts from earlier authors, and thereby, in spite of their polemical intentions, helping to make a fundamental positive contribution to the development of Latin philology and elaborating lists of Virgil's "sources" (transmitted by Macrobius and Servius) that, properly used, can still be of great help for modern scholars.

In the first century A.D., Virgil remains the supreme Latin author (even if, during the reign of Nero, Seneca and his circle sought originality by ostentatiously preferring Ovid). It is to this period that most of the minor imitations of his poetry, later gathered into the *Appendix Vergiliana*, are likely to belong (these will be discussed in part 4, when we come to the age in which these pseudo-Virgilian works were composed); his verses are found scratched on the walls of Pompeii, and Petronius delighted in creating variations, sometimes obscene, on verses of the *Aeneid*. Towards the
end of the century, Virgil’s popularity seems to have reached a high point (coinciding, perhaps not accidentally, with Quintilian’s conspicuous anti-Senecan polemics): Statius asked his *Thebaid* to follow the *Aeneid* “at a distance” and to revere its footsteps (*Theb. 12.816–17*), and Silius Italicus not only imitated Virgil’s poetry with almost religious scrupulosity but even collected mementos of the poet, bought the land on which his tomb was located, and celebrated his birthday every year as his own.

The foundations of the scholarly tradition of exegesis of Virgil’s poems were laid in the first and second centuries A.D. by Valerius Probus and thereafter especially by C. Julius Hyginus, L. Annaeus Cornutus, and Aemilius Asper. Although the running commentaries for students that have survived (above all Servius, but also the smaller collections of scholia and the rhetorical commentary of Tiberius Donatus) all date from the fourth century, they preserve a considerable amount of earlier material, much of it deriving from this period, while the essays on Virgil in Macrobius’s *Saturnalia* give us an idea of what earlier scholarly *hypomnemata* might have looked like. The rhetoricians, too, took their examples from Virgil’s poems and debated whether he was more an orator or a poet; one declamation survives, composed by Ennodius and purporting to be a speech by Dido upon the departure of Aeneas. The ancient allegorical tradition of Virgil exegesis, already established by the time of Donatus and Servius, culminated in the sixth century in the work of Fulgentius, who interpreted the twelve books of the *Aeneid* as the twelve stages of man’s life from infancy to old age, while the widespread conviction that Virgil knew everything, including the future, led to the use of his verses as oracles and prophecies (*sortes Vergilianae*). And through late antiquity Virgil continued to be a favorite object for scholastic poetry; exercises on Virgilian themes and in Virgil’s style flourished (in the fourth century, for example, Avienus rewrote Virgil’s poems in iambic trimeters), as did so-called centos, in which every single verse was derived unchanged from Virgil but, because it was put into a different order and context, its meaning was completely changed (thus, e.g., the *Medea* “written” around 200 by Hosidius Geta and Ausonius’s *cento nuptialis*). When such poetic exercises are transmitted in fragmentary form on papyri, we sometimes cannot be sure whether they are to be attributed to advanced students or to professional poetasters.

No other Latin author survives so massively, so anciently, and so excellently as Virgil. We have three ancient manuscripts, almost complete, written in the fifth or sixth century in rustic capital scripts (known in the early Middle Ages as *litterae Vergilianae*, precisely because so few codices in this script survived for any other author), and four others, in more fragmentary condition, dating from the fourth or fifth century (of these ancient manuscripts, two have important illustrations and one, decorated initials); and of the surviving Latin papyri whose authors can be identified, Virgil appears on more than half (one papyrus, which dates perhaps from the first or second century, may have been written only a century later than his death).
For Christian late antiquity, Virgil is by far the most popular Latin poet: Jerome was intimately familiar with his works; Augustine cannot retell the story of his life without seeing crucial episodes through the lens of the *Aeneid*; the Christian poetess Proba even composed a Virgilian cento about Jesus. This continued unchanged throughout the Middle Ages, when Virgil (despite occasional protests by such figures as Alcuin and Ermenrich) was a central school author and the fourth eclogue and the *Aeneid* were the most widely read Latin poems; in Chaucer’s *House of Fame* Virgil stands alone on a column of gleaming tinned iron. Inevitably, however, the pagan poet had to be Christianized if he was to remain a supreme authority for a changed world. According to medieval legend, St. Paul visited Virgil’s tomb in Naples and wept because Virgil had died too soon to be converted by him; yet in mystery plays, Virgil appeared together with the Sibyl and the Prophets as a witness to the Incarnation. For those with eyes to see, the fourth eclogue was evidently an announcement of the birth of the Redeemer—thus already Lactantius and Eusebius, and somewhat later Augustine and Prudentius, among countless others—and Vincent of Beauvais could still report that three pagans had been converted to Christianity by reading this eclogue (and who can be sure that he was wrong?).

But it was above all the *Aeneid* that not only furnished, particularly in book 6, ample material for the many medieval legends of Virgil as a sage, a magician, a prophet, and a saint (confusion with *virga*, the term for a magician’s wand, may even have contributed to the transformation of the Latin *Vergilius* into the vernacular *Vtrgi/*) but also provided the greatest challenges and the greatest rewards to allegorical interpretation. The epic was seen as an image of human life in which wisdom and virtue (represented by Aeneas) triumphed with the help of the gods over folly and passion (represented by Dido and Turnus). Fulgentius’s twelve-book allegory was drawn upon seven centuries later by Bernardus Silvestris, who explained books 1–6 as the six stages of life (the shipwreck onto the shores of Carthage in book 1, birth; the fires of Troy in book 2, the passions of youth; the visit to the Underworld in book 6, the passage to the next life). Similar readings are expressed or implied by such authors as John of Salisbury and Dante. Indeed, Dante’s reverence for Virgil represents one of the high points of the Latin poet’s Nachleben and one of the deepest sources for the Italian poet’s creativity (“*tu se’ solo colui,*” he tells him in *Inferno* 1.86–87, “*da cu’io tolsi / lo bello stile che m’ha fatto onore*”). He respects “l’altissimo poeta” as the symbol of the highest limits attainable by unaided human wisdom and chooses him as his guide through *Inferno* and most of *Purgatorio* (where he must turn over his charge to Statius, who was born later and hence could be saved).

But the *Divine Comedy* was not the only poetic form assumed by Virgil’s medieval reception. From the ninth to the twelfth century Virgil spawned new medieval epic genres, of myth, of chivalry, and of philosophy, such as Ekkehard’s *Waltharius* and Walter of Châtillon’s *Alexandris*. In the second half of the twelfth century the *Roman d’Énias* (adapted in Heinrich von
Veldeke's *Eneida* provided an Ovidian continuation to the *Roman de Troie*, elaborating in detail upon Aeneas's love affair with Lavinia. And in the fourteenth century Petrarch (who admired Virgil and Cicero above all other Latin authors and whose carefully annotated manuscript of Virgil is preserved in Milan) wrote twelve Latin eclogues and an epic, the *Africa*, closely modeled on the *Aeneid*, and Boccaccio composed a *Thebaid*, which contained not only the same number of books as the *Aeneid* (which is not remarkable) but even the same number of lines (which is).

Virgil remained one of the most important school authors long after the Middle Ages (though, unsurprisingly, in the sixteenth century Jesuit schools banned certain eclogues and the fourth book of the *Aeneid*). Imitations of his poems continued to dominate literature in the Renaissance and for another couple of centuries. The *Eclogues* found in Mantuanus a writer of Latin bucolic poems whose very name betrayed his literary affiliation and in Sannazaro an imitator so influential that his sentimental nostalgia for a lost Arcadia distorted readings of Virgil’s tougher bucolic poetry for centuries, while in English poetry Spenser’s *Shepherd’s Calendar* created a tradition that was deconstructed in Milton’s *Lycidas* and resynthesized in Pope’s four *Pastorals*.

But it was neither the *Eclogues* nor, of course, the *Georgics* that above all captured readers in this period, but rather the *Aeneid*. The epic was studied closely by humanist scholars, many of whom still accepted allegorical interpretations of it (thus in Latin Alberti and Coluccio Salutati, who cited Bernardus Silvestris, and in the vernacular Landino); it was “completed” by the addition of a thirteenth book that brought its plot to a natural close; it was set above Homer as the most perfect ancient epic (thus *Vida, De Arte Poetica* 1527, and generally until such eighteenth-century critics as Lessing); and it founded the Renaissance genre of historical epic, which went on from Petrarch to flourish in such poets as Camões, Tasso, and Milton, to subside in Ronsard’s *Franciade* (unfinished, in four books), and finally to die out in Pope’s unfinished *Brutus* and in Voltaire’s unread *Henriade*. Parallel and complementary to these serious epics flourished a tradition of travesties and burlesques, in which the historical distance between Virgil and modern times was transposed into a stylistic tension between lofty characters and vulgar or obscene language and incidents (G. Lalli, *Aeneida travestita*, 1633; P. Scarron, *Le Virgile travesti*, 1648–53).

Virgil continued to be read in Latin for centuries. Shakespeare probably knew at least the earlier books of the *Aeneid* in Latin, while Milton’s *Paradise Lost* attempts to provide an English equivalent not only for Virgil’s epic themes but even for his syntax, diction, and, as far as possible, meter. But in Britain he was also particularly well served by translations. In the sixteenth century the epic was translated into Scottish verse by Gavin Douglas (the "Aeneid") and into English by Henry Howard, earl of Surrey ("Aeneid", books 2 and 4); in the seventeenth century it was translated by Dryden (the "Aeneid"). It was translated in the eighteenth century by Christopher Pitt (the "Aeneid") and Joseph Warton (the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics*), and in the same century Eugenios Bulgaris translated the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid* “back” into Hom-
eric Greek hexameters (already in antiquity Arrian had translated the *Georgics* into Greek, and a Greek translation of the fourth eclogue seems to lie behind a speech of Constantine's reported by Eusebius). Even those who could read Virgil in no language at all were not spared contact with his themes: although he was never as popular in music and the visual arts as Ovid, he did provide material for Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (Nahum Tate composed the words) and later for Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* and Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, as well as for paintings by Tiepolo, Claude Lorrain, Turner, and others (thereby reviving a tradition found in ancient mosaics and wall paintings).

Schiller still admired and translated Virgil, but with the advent of Romanticism, his fortunes suffered a decline; for certain tastes (thus Goethe) he could no doubt seem too literary, too reflective, too elitist. And although he has continued to remain one of the most popular school authors wherever Latin is taught, over the past two centuries he has gradually been displaced to the margins of modern culture. During the same period, however, he has continued to fascinate lyric poets in France (Hugo, Baudelaire, Valéry), Italy (Pascoli), and England (Tennyson, T. S. Eliot), and at least one novelist, Hermann Broch, has used the story of the poet's dying wish to burn the *Aeneid* as the basis for a profound meditation on life, death, art, and history (*Der Tod des Vergil*, 1945). If the nineteenth century could sometimes read Virgil as an apologist for imperialism and the various Fascist movements of the twentieth century could canonize him as a propagandist of ruthless service to the state, since the Second World War he has tended more to be prized as a poet of peace who loved bucolic tranquillity and abhorred the horrors of war. And over the last several decades, with the rise of environmentalism, first the *Eclogues* and then even the *Georgics* have enjoyed modest waves of renewed popularity.

Beyond the influence exercised by his individual works, Virgil has also provided the Western literary tradition with its most compelling and durable model of a poetic career, one beginning with small, unambitious, personal works (the *Eclogues*), moving on to more difficult tasks of greater intellectual complexity and social significance (the *Georgics*), and culminating in a single massive work that subsumes all the earlier ones and provides an epic mirror for the destiny of a nation (the *Aeneid*). The influence exercised by this model can already be traced in the first century A.D. in some of the poems of the *Appendix Vergiliana* and in Lucan. And for many centuries it continued to provide poets with a guideline for their own development and with suggestions for what kind of poem to write next, through the Middle Ages (when the three genres involved were known as the "rota Virgilii") and the early modern period (when it fascinated such poets as Spenser, Milton, and Pope), and even into Romanticism (it stands behind the English Romantic poets' dream of concluding their career with a single great philosophical epic) and the twentieth century (Proust, Joyce, and Musil all begin with smaller and more personal works before moving on to their larger epics). If even today we sometimes tend to regard with suspicion a young author who presumes to begin his career with a large-scale
epic or an aging one who has still not moved on from smaller and more precious literary modes, this is due not only to widespread general assumptions about what is appropriate to the different stages of human life but also, more specifically, to Virgil.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The standard modern critical texts are those of R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford 1972) and M. Geymonat (Turin 1973, with fuller apparatus); the Loeb is by H. R. Fairclough (2 vols., London 1934–35), but there is a better bilingual edition of the Eclogues by Guy Lee (Liverpool 1980, with brief notes). There are numerous modern translations; note esp. those of C. Day Lewis with introductions by R.O.A.M. Lyne (Eclogues and Georgics, Oxford 1983) and J. Griffin (Aeneid, Oxford 1986), as well as D. West’s prose version of the Aeneid (Harmondsworth 1990).

The last complete scholarly commentary in English was that of J. Conington and H. Nettleship (ed. 3 London 1881–83), which remains invaluable. There is an introductory Macmillan commentary on the complete works by T. E. Page (3 vols., London 1894–1900), which is complemented rather than replaced by the similar set by R. D. Williams (London 1979, 1972–73). For the Eclogues, see the editions of R. Coleman (Cambridge 1977) and, mainly for its bibliography, E. Coleiro (Amsterdam 1979); on the Georgics, those of R. F. Thomas (2 vols., Cambridge 1988) and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford 1990). There is a commentary with brief notes on the whole Aeneid by J. W. Mackail (Oxford 1930, occasionally useful), and James Henry’s Aeneida (Edinburgh 1873–89) offers acute if sometimes eccentric discussion of selected passages. Modern work has concentrated on editions of individual books. The commentaries of R. G. Austin on books 1, 2, 4, and 6 (Oxford 1971, 1966, 1955, 1977) are particularly suggestive; note also the massive commentary on book 4 by A. S. Pease (Cambridge, Mass. 1935) and the less detailed commentaries on books 7 and 8 by C. J. Fordyce (Oxford 1977), on book 8 by P. T. Eden (Leiden 1975) and K. W. Gransden (Cambridge 1976), and on book 11 by K. W. Gransden (Cambridge 1991). There is a major edition of book 10 by S. J. Harrison (Oxford 1992). Among those in other languages might be mentioned the complete commentaries by C. G. Heyne and G.P.E. Wagner (ed. 4 Leipzig 1830–41, Latin) and T. Ladewig (Berlin 1876–86, German) and esp. the great commentary on book 6 by E. Norden (ed. 3 Stuttgart 1926, German). The plain text of the Eclogues by C. Hosius (Bonn 1915) has much useful information on sources and analogues in the brief Latin notes.

again a convenient starting point; more recent works include M.C.J. Putnam, Virgil's Poem of the Earth (Princeton 1979), G. B. Miles, Virgil's Georgics: A New Interpretation (Berkeley 1980), P. A. Johnston, Virgil's Agricultural Golden Age (Leiden 1980), D. O. Ross, Virgil's Elements (Princeton 1987), C. Perkell, The Poet's Truth (Berkeley 1989), and J. Farrell, Virgil's Georgics and the Traditions of Ancient Epic (New York 1991). On the Aeneid, there is a collection of articles edited by S. J. Harrison, Oxford Readings in Virgil's Aeneid (Oxford 1990), with an introduction offering one view of twentieth-century Virgilian scholarship; see also W. R. Johnson, Darkness Visible (Berkeley 1976) 1–22, W. Suerbaum, Vergils Aeneis: Beitrag zu ihrer Rezeption in Gegenwart und Geschichte (Bamberg 1981), and the introduction to the Italian collection by P. Serpa, Il Punto su Virgilio (Rome 1987). The two most important books are both in German, R. Heinze, Vergils epische Technik (ed. 3 Leipzig 1915), and V. Pöschl, Die Dichtkunst Virgils: Bild und Symbol in der Aeneis (ed. 3 Berlin 1977); however, an earlier edition of the latter was translated into English by G. Seligson as The Art of Virgil (Ann Arbor 1962), and the essence of Heinze’s views, especially on the source material, is summarized in H. W. Prescott, The Development of Virgil’s Art (Chicago 1927). There is a brief and jejune Introduction to Virgil’s Aeneid by W. A. Camps (Oxford 1969); brief, too, but better are R. D. Williams, The Aeneid (London 1987), and K. W. Grandsen, Virgil: The Aeneid (Cambridge 1990). The “pessimistic” view of the epic was developed especially by scholars associated with Harvard; see, e.g., A. Parry, “The Two Voices of Virgil’s Aeneid,” Arion 2 (1965) 66–80, W. V. Clausen, “An Interpretation of the Aeneid,” HSCP 68 (1964) 139–47, both frequently reprinted, and M. C. J. Putnam, The Poetry of the Aeneid (Cambridge, Mass. 1965). Recent work within this tradition includes two works by R.O.A.M. Lyne, Further Voices in Vergil’s Aeneid (Oxford 1987) and Words and the Poet (Oxford 1989). On the other side, there have been two notable attempts to reestablish an “Augustan” reading: P. R. Hardie, Virgil’s Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium (Oxford 1986), and F. Cairns, Virgil’s Augustan Epic (Cambridge 1989). But in general there are fewer book-length studies in English of the Aeneid than might be expected; in addition to those already mentioned, however, note K. Quinn, Virgil’s Aeneid: A Critical Introduction (London 1968), and G. Williams, Techniques and Ideas in the Aeneid (New Haven 1983). In German might be mentioned also F. J. Worstbrock, Elemente einer Poetik der Aeneis (Münster 1963), V. Buchheit, Virgil über die Sendung Roms (Heidelberg 1963), and A. Wlosok, Die Göttin Venus in Vergils Aeneis (Heidelberg 1967).


On all aspects of the Aeneid, the monumental Italian Enciclopedia Virgiliana (Rome 1984–) is invaluable. The bibliographies by W. Suerbaum in ANRW 31.1 (Berlin 1980) are excellent; see also M. T. Morano Rando, Bibliografia virgiliana (Genoa 1987).