

20th and 21st Century Political Interpretations of
Virgil's *Aeneid*, *Eclogues*, and *Georgics*

By
Katri Niemi
M.A., University of Kansas, 2018
B.A., Rice University, 2014

Submitted to the graduate degree program in Classics and the Graduate
Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts.

Chair: Tara Welch

Emma Scioli

Anne Rabe

Date Defended: May 10, 2018

The thesis committee for Katri Niemi certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

20th and 21st Century Political Interpretations of
Virgil's *Aeneid*, *Eclogues*, and *Georgics*

Chair: Tara Welch

Emma Scioli

Anne Rabe

Date Approved: May 10, 2018

ABSTRACT

Virgil's works have been interpreted in striking ways during periods of political upheaval in the 20th and 21st centuries. Following the end of World War I, Benito Mussolini saw the *Aeneid*, *Eclogues*, and *Georgics* as good resources for re-unifying Italy due to the values and themes they promoted, especially agrarianism, empire, and war. Mussolini's readings of these texts were entirely optimistic and programmatic. After World War II, a shift occurred in interpretations of the *Aeneid* towards pessimism that came to be known as "The Harvard School of Thought". These scholars saw a darkness and negativity not understood before in the text. Finally, the Alt-Right movement of the 2010s interprets the *Aeneid* as pro-white and anti-immigration. Given these three unique readings, the applicability and relevance Virgil and his works have to modern politics and wars are clear, as is the malleability of their interpretations based on people's agendas.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the immense help of Dr. Tara Welch, chair of my committee. She was my guiding light through this entire process, and her help was beyond invaluable. I would also like to thank Dr. Anne Rabe and Dr. Emma Scioli, who painstakingly read through every page of my thesis and provided indispensable comments and feedback. With my committee's help, I was able to turn my thesis into something I am extremely proud of. Next, I would like to thank my friends for all of their love and support during this yearlong process. Lastly, and most importantly, I would like to express my endless gratitude to my mom and dad. I would not be where I am today without them. Thank you for always supporting my love of Latin. *Te amo semper et in aeternum.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: MUSSOLINI AND VIRGIL	8
CHAPTER TWO: THE RISE OF THE HARVARD SCHOOL OF THOUGHT	34
CHAPTER THREE: THE ALT-RIGHT AND VIRGIL	65
CONCLUSION	84
BIBLIOGRAPHY	88

LIST OF FIGURES

- A. Close-up of central Virgil statue in Piazza Virgiliana
- B. Piazza Virgiliana statues
- C. Close-up of first secondary statue in Piazza Virgiliana
- D. Close-up of second secondary statue in Piazza Virgiliana
- E. Breitbart News pseudonymous author Virgil's use of the image of Virgil

Introduction

Over two thousand years after Virgil wrote his *Aeneid*, *Eclogues*, and *Georgics*, these works are still being read and interpreted throughout the Western world. As the German writer Theodor Haecker once wrote, Virgil is the “Father of the West”.¹ Virgil’s works, especially the *Aeneid*, have been used to assert and maintain the strength of Western civilization and also solidify the European world order.² The English writer T.S. Eliot once wrote that Virgil’s poems were classics “at the centre of European civilization” and his *Aeneid* was “the classic of all Europe”.³ Eliot also called Virgil’s works universal.⁴ Virgil’s works spoke, and still speak, to so many common themes and values. As Charles Martindale wrote about the *Aeneid*, “both classic and empire exist within history, but also transcend history, evincing both permanence and change”.⁵ These three authors wrote in distinctly different periods of the 20th century, but argue for the same permanence and relevance of Virgil, which highlights how easily Virgil transcends boundaries. Thus, the fact that Virgil’s works continue to be read all the way into 2018 speaks volumes about their ability to be adapted and interpreted. Virgil’s works, especially the *Aeneid*, will always be relevant because they transcend time. The *Aeneid* has “the capacity for constant reinscription within new temporal contexts”.⁶

The *Aeneid* is often the work most embraced in modern culture, with the *Eclogues* and *Georgics* receiving far less attention. What makes the *Aeneid* so relevant is that the *Aeneid* is what Theodore Ziolkowski calls a “secondary epic”.⁷ A secondary epic consists of heroes and

¹ Theodor Haecker, *Vergil, Vater des Abendlandes*. Leipzig, Germany: Hegner-Bücherei, Kösel, München, 1931.

² S.J. Harrison, “Some Views of the *Aeneid* in the Twentieth Century.” *Oxford Readings in Vergil’s Aeneid*. Ed. S.J. Harrison. United States: Oxford University Press, 1990, 3.

³ T.S. Eliot, *What is a Classic?* London, England: Faber, 1945, 29, 70.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Charles Martindale, “The Classic of all Europe.” *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*. Ed. Charles Martindale. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 4.

⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁷ Theodore Ziolkowski, *Virgil and the Moderns*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993, 131.

their legends, but it also deals with other themes that exist within the stories, such as fate, family, and piety, or even themes of war and destruction. It is not merely about the hero himself or “brave men fighting to save their lives or to get home or to avenge their kinsmen”.⁸ There is also an emphasis on humanity and humanness in these epics, namely what it means to be a human and how humans behave. It recognizes that heroes are human and that they have emotions that drive their actions. Aeneas especially struggles with his emotions and his *humanitas* throughout the *Aeneid*, as is shown by his tears in Book 1 when he sees the paintings of the Trojan War in the Temple of Juno at Carthage.⁹ As C.S. Lewis wrote, “Aeneas [lived] in a different world; he [was] compelled to see something more important than happiness”.¹⁰

Given the complexity of the *Aeneid* and of Aeneas as a character, readers are able to adapt and interpret the meaning of the text in numerous ways. There is no cut and dry approach to the *Aeneid*. Thus, the *Aeneid* has been received in countless different ways by readers for over two thousand years. The theory of reception must first be discussed before looking at any of these receptions of Virgil’s works. Reception theory focuses not only on what words mean but also on how they mean, representing not just the reader’s interpretation of the author’s words but how those words function in the greater world.¹¹ There is a multi-layer system of receiving these works. Reception theory is also heavily reliant upon cultural context, namely time and place as well as preconceived notions of the reader.¹² There is no way for modern readers to read the *Aeneid* as if they themselves were Romans; they only have historical references to go on as their window into Ancient Rome. Modern readers are far more influenced by their own cultures and

⁸ C.S. Lewis, “Virgil and the Subject of Secondary Epic.” *Virgil*. Ed. Steele Commager. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966, 67.

⁹ *A.* 1.459-465

¹⁰ Lewis, 66.

¹¹ Martindale, 8.

¹² *Ibid.*

by their own personal experiences than by history. Thus, the message of humanity in the *Aeneid* lies in the reader's eyes alone.

In general, however, there seem to be two consistently popular readings of the *Aeneid*, either positive/optimistic or negative/pessimistic. Those who read it as optimistic view Aeneas as a hero who overcomes every difficulty, fulfills his duty to his country, and creates the catalyst for the later founding of the Roman Empire. This version of the *Aeneid* upholds imperialistic values. It should be noted here that the *Aeneid* was written under the eye of the Emperor Augustus. The poem supported the empire and the empire the poem. Those who read the *Aeneid* as pessimistic view Aeneas as a failed hero who succumbs to violence and barbarism. He is an “uncertain, sensitive, and quasi-existentialist hero”.¹³ This version does not support imperialistic values.

A third view of the *Aeneid* has gained some popularity, but it is a far less nuanced understanding of the text itself. This third view can be qualified as “neutral”; it is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. Scholars who advocate this view believe the *Aeneid* is simply just a poem. The poem is only concerned with “poetic ideas” and not politics.¹⁴ Gordon Williams is one of the bigger proponents of this view, arguing for a “demythologizing” of the text.¹⁵ He takes the divine intervention out of the story and places all responsibility on the free will of humans. Men are responsible for their own actions and the subsequent consequences.¹⁶ His entire argument focuses on human action in the text, but also acknowledges the immense human suffering and loss present. He argues that the human suffering is caused by war and the search for empire. Harrison, however, has noted that this third view is not simply poetic, but also

¹³ Harrison (1990), 5.

¹⁴ Ibid., 18.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

political because of its focus on human suffering; he folds it into the pessimistic view. Thus, in Harrison's estimation, there is no such thing as a "neutral" view.

A fourth view of the *Aeneid* can be taken that is more realistic and subtle than the so-called "neutral" view from above. This fourth view combines the optimistic with the pessimistic, in a sort of balancing act. It recognizes the fact that both positives and negatives exist in the story and they are not mutually exclusive. Depending on the book, or even scene, the optimistic voice and pessimistic voice are constantly changing the balance. In Book 6, specifically with Anchises' prophecy, the optimistic voice wins out, but at the same time there is a tinge of regret with the death of Marcellus. In Book 12, specifically at the end with Aeneas' killing of Turnus, the pessimistic voice wins out, but there is still some optimism as Aeneas has finally triumphed. Adam Parry, whose ideas will be discussed at length in my second chapter, argues that the *Aeneid* has "a public voice of triumph, and a private voice of regret".¹⁷ This view is what I more accurately label as "ambivalent". I personally find the "ambivalent" view more compelling as it accounts for the entirety of the epic, not just specific parts. Nevertheless, the optimistic and pessimistic views remain the most popular among readers.

Looking at the extremes of this range of views of the *Aeneid* (optimistic and pessimistic), it becomes clear that they center mostly on the portrayal of war and empire in the text and how Aeneas acts in response to them. Thus, it is not surprising that Virgil's legacy in the early to mid 20th century is closely tied to the realities of politics and war. In my thesis, I will discuss the ways in which the *Aeneid*, as well as the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics* to a lesser extent, have been received by people during periods of political upheaval in the 20th and 21st centuries.

¹⁷ Parry, Adam. "The Two Voices of Virgil's 'Aeneid'." *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and Classics*. 2.4 (1963): 79.

Following the end of World War I, the first big modern reception of Virgil's works occurred in Italy. World War I had left Europe in great cultural, economic, and social distress. Countries were divided. People were displaced. Thus, fascist and nationalist movements began to emerge advocating for a return to national identity in order to unite their countries. In Italy, Benito Mussolini, the leader of the Italian fascist movement, saw the *Aeneid*, as well as the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics*, as good resources for re-unifying Italy. Mussolini believed strongly that he would bring Italy into its next Golden Age, just like Emperor Augustus had done. He rooted his fascist regime in ancient Roman ideals and values.¹⁸ His fascist policies supported a return to agrarianism and ruralism, which he promoted through use of the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics*. He pushed for a new Italian Empire, for which he relied heavily on the *Aeneid*. Mussolini, like so many military leaders, viewed the *Aeneid* optimistically for its pro-imperialist and pro-military views. In my first chapter, I will discuss Mussolini's use and application of the *Aeneid*, the *Eclogues*, and the *Georgics*.

Following the end of World War II, a striking, and not so surprising, shift occurred in interpretations of the *Aeneid*. A large influx of pessimistic readings of the *Aeneid* began to surface. This influx by American scholars is known today as "The Harvard School of Thought". There has been much discussion, and some controversy, over what exactly led to the emergence of the Harvard School of Thought, but it is pertinent that it emerged at the end of the deadliest and most destructive war in history. Some attribute its rise to the Vietnam War and the ensuing extreme distrust of the United States' government and military, but many of the works were published well before the United States first became involved in Vietnam in 1964. Perhaps the most convincing argument for the rise of The Harvard School of Thought is a mix of post-

¹⁸ Charles Fantazzi, "Homage to Virgil." *Why Virgil?* Ed. Stephanie Quinn. Wauconda, Illinois: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc., 2000, 285.

war/Cold War fears and the implementation of a new form of literary criticism called New Criticism, which promoted close analysis of the language of texts over consideration of cultural, historical, and political factors. In my second chapter, I will discuss the potential reasons for the emergence of The Harvard School of Thought as well as the scholars' most common arguments about the *Aeneid*.

The readings of Mussolini and the Harvard School of Thought map onto the traditional optimistic and pessimistic readings of Virgil. But an even more distinctive reading of the *Aeneid* and use of Virgil is currently occurring in 2018, having started in the early 2010s. The Alt-Right movement, popularized by the rise of Donald Trump, has taken Virgil and the *Aeneid* as their own. Adherents to the Alt-Right believe that they are defenders of Western Civilization and White Exceptionalism and in turn have appropriated the Classics as their own. They firmly believe that Classics and Greco-Roman culture belong to them due to their white maleness. By using the Classics, they find they are able to justify and lend authority to their movement. In turn, several news platforms, social media users, and bloggers have begun utilizing Virgil and the *Aeneid* in this vein. In my third chapter, I will discuss the uses of Virgil and the *Aeneid* by the Alt-Right movement. As this is such a new movement and new use of Virgil, there are no secondary sources to support what I have found. I personally do not support the Alt-Right movement in any way, shape, or form, and thus, in my third chapter, I will attempt to silence my personal bias and write an unbiased analysis. To me, the Alt-Right does not have a right to the Classics, try as they might. It should also be noted that the Alt-Right movement has strong parallels to the fascist and other nationalist movements of the 1920s and 1930s, especially with Alt-Right groups calling themselves neo-fascists and neo-Nazis. Thus, there seems to be a sort of cyclicity of misappropriations of Virgil's works by far-right political movements.

Given these three unique readings of Virgil by Mussolini, The Harvard School of Thought, and the Alt-Right, the applicability of Virgil and his works to modern politics and wars is clear, as is the malleability of their interpretations based on people's agendas. It is also clear that there can be no one definitive reading of these texts. It is up to the reader to interpret Virgil and to adapt his works. As mentioned earlier, it is the readers' biases and experiences that come through in their readings. Those who seek empire view Virgil as pro-empire. Those who hate empire view Virgil as anti-empire. Those who fear war for its immense human suffering and losses view Virgil as sympathetic to that suffering. Those who want to defend white culture view Virgil as the ultimate white elite male. Whether the readings are sympathetic of victims or supportive of anti-immigration values, the relevance that Virgil still has two thousand years later is undeniable.

Chapter One: Mussolini and Virgil

Almost two thousand years after Virgil's lifetime and the publication of his *Aeneid*, fascist and nationalist political movements began to appear in Europe. Virgil and his works were utilized by the Italian fascist movement to promote Italian unity through the myth of *romanità* following the end of World War I. Benito Mussolini read Virgil's works, especially the *Aeneid*, as favorable towards imperialism and military power. He saw countless opportunities to utilize the values and ideals present in Virgil's texts to support his fascist policies. However, Mussolini manipulated and exploited these texts solely for his own gain. It was not for the protection of Roman history or literature. Mussolini simply needed a stronger classical and historical foundation for his new fascist Italy, and Virgil was the poet to do that.

I. Historical Context

During and after World War I, many European countries were reeling from the effects of the Great War. They were divided politically, socially, and culturally, and so there was a need for unification. Countries such as France, Germany, and Italy reacted to the need for unification with a push towards conservatism. This conservatism morphed into the political movements of fascism and nationalism, which put nation (and sometimes race) above the individual through an autocratic totalitarian-type government. As Helen Roche states in the introduction to the volume, *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany*, "fascist movements tend to glorify the national past of the country in which they arise".¹⁹

By glorifying the past, countries such as Italy made the use of classics, also known as classicism, one of the foundations of their unification. Theodore Ziolkowski points out in his book, *Classicism of the Twenties*, that classicism is a response to the "eternal and universal

¹⁹ Helen Roche. "'Distant Models?' Italian Fascism, National Socialism and the Lure of the Classics." *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany*. Ed. Helen Roche and Kyriakos Demetriou. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2018, 3.

struggle between order and chaos, discipline and license, authority and freedom”.²⁰ “Totalitarian Classicism” was a move away from the excessiveness and upheaval of the late 19th and early 20th centuries towards “measure, restraint, and clarity” and “order, discipline, and tradition” in all aspects of society, not just government.²¹ Across Europe, manifestos and other publications began to surface calling for a return to the classics. In the spring of 1919, the journal *La Ronda* in Italy published its first journal with a classical focus.²² Several more journals and books were published that correlated classicism with order and conservatism, and soon the early foundations of fascism were born.

As mentioned previously, fascism looks back to the past for its foundation. In Italy, that past was ancient Rome, specifically the Roman Empire, a time when Rome was at its height both militarily and culturally. Italy already had its traditions of *romanità* and *latinité*, and so it was simply a question of renewing its past. Several scholars of the fascist era argued that “Rome [was] the true alter ego of [Euro-American civilizations]”.²³ Ancient Rome was constantly being paralleled with the events of the early 20th century. Adolf Hitler, in his memoir *Mein Kampf*, once compared the political turmoil surrounding the emergence of Christianity in late antiquity to the emergence of Communism in the 1920s, saying “Roman history...remains the best teacher not only for today, but indeed for all times”.²⁴ This view was widely held in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. In Italy, the government mandated compulsory study of Latin and Roman history in

²⁰ Theodore Ziolkowski, *Classicism of the Twenties*. Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2015, 10.

²¹ Roche, 3. Ziolkowski (2015), 10, 18.

²² Ziolkowski (2015), 50.

²³ As chronicled in Ziolkowski (2015), 61. “The turn to antiquity is evident in the Roman analogy that constitutes a central theme in [historical] works [from this time period]...like ancient Rome, [Western culture] was attaining a similar stage of cosmopolitan imperialism.”

²⁴ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*. Munich, Germany: Franz Eher Nachfolger, 1932. 469-470.

1923.²⁵ The Italian fascist government even appropriated the *fascio littorio* or lictoral fasces for their movement, calling them a “symbol of unity, power, and justice”.²⁶

Fascism became the official political party of the Italian government in 1922 with the appointment of Benito Mussolini to the position of Prime Minister. Prior to this, Mussolini had been the leader of the National Fascist Party, which had gone through various iterations and names. He garnered massive support with the Italian military and much of the Italian people who then marched on Rome on October 28, 1922 and demanded the resignation of the current Prime Minister, Luigi Facta, whom they deemed to be too liberal. King Victor Emmanuel stepped in and forced the resignation of Facta and then appointed Mussolini. Not surprisingly, the King’s decision was highly controversial. However, the decision stood, as most of Italy feared the potential for civil war and in turn, believed that Mussolini could restore order, similar to Augustus following Caesar’s death.

When Mussolini took over during the March on Rome, he declared, “Civis Romanus sum” or “I am a Roman citizen”. Mussolini sought to create an idealistic Italy based on ancient Rome, specifically late Republican and early Imperial Rome. He referred to himself as the new Caesar, and later the new Augustus. This new era for Rome was often referred to as the *Terza Roma*, or third Rome, stemming from the first and second Romes with Caesar and Augustus.²⁷ Mussolini wanted his fascist Italy to exemplify Ancient Rome. Italy would be renewed to its former glory and become in a sense a continuation of the former Roman Empire, a concept that greatly appealed to the Italian people. To Mussolini, the Roman Empire never truly fell, but simply had a large setback.

²⁵ Ziolkowski (2015), 61.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁷ Jan Nelis, “Fascist Modernity, Religion, and the Myth of Rome.” *Brill’s Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany*. Ed. Helen Roche and Kyriakos Demetriou. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2018, 135.

Mussolini's immense push towards Romanization and the already present traditions of *romanità* and *latinité* created the foundations for the new fascist Italy. *Latinité*, as mentioned previously, focused on the Latin language. Under Mussolini, Latin became "the perfect expression of the new spirit of Italian Fascism".²⁸ New poems and works of prose were written in the Latin language, often in praise of Mussolini or supporting the new regime. With the renewed focus on Latin, Mussolini used *romanità* to create the basis for the propaganda used during his rule. Jan Nelis argues in her essay, *Fascist Modernity, Religion, and the Myth of Rome*, that the simple "Roman salute" of extending the right arm upward at an angle with palm down, which has been co-opted countless times, most notably by the Nazis, was one of the most effective uses of Roman propaganda.²⁹

Many more attempts were made by Mussolini to fascisticize Italy. Mussolini saw an opportunity with the ancient monuments of Rome to create connections between the ancient monuments and modern fascism, especially with the Mausoleum of Augustus and the Ara Pacis. He resurrected these monuments through excavations and put them on display for the purpose of highlighting Rome's former greatness. He then used these monuments as parallels to demonstrate the coming greatness of the new fascist Italy as well as to help foster the rise of nationalism. To further emphasize the connections between the ancient monuments and modern fascism, he had the Piazza Venezia, a giant building built with a mix of classicist and modern architecture, constructed right next to the Forum and the Colosseum. Its prime location made the Piazza Venezia the center of all of the monuments. As Jan Nelis argues, the fascists used these ancient monuments and their own fascistic architecture only for the purpose of showing off

²⁸ Roche, 7.

²⁹ Nelis (2018), 135.

Roman greatness and grandeur, not for historical purposes. The fascists wanted ancient Rome and modern fascistic Italy to be recognized as one connected entity.³⁰

Apart from the monuments of ancient Rome, Mussolini forged connections between the ancient literature of Rome, specifically of Virgil, and modern fascism. Mussolini utilized the ideas and ideals presented in Virgil's *Aeneid*, *Georgics*, and *Eclogues* to further unify and solidify his fascist Italy. But before looking at Mussolini's uses of the *Aeneid*, the *Georgics*, and the *Eclogues*, a brief outline of his rule and the spread of fascism must be provided. Prior to 1925, Mussolini focused his rule on unifying Italy. He had obtained temporary dictatorial powers from the Italian legislature when he assumed his role as Prime Minister in 1922, but by 1925, he officially established himself as the dictator of Italy and began shifting his focus towards expanding the Italian Empire. He firmly believed that Italy needed to expand across the Mediterranean and into East Africa. With this dream of expansion in mind, he still spent much of his time on maintaining the unification and the strength of Italy, as there were several pressing economic issues facing Italy at the time, but by May of 1936, he officially conquered Ethiopia, thus finally expanding the empire.

Following his declaration of empire in May of 1936, Mussolini's focus moved towards a very Augustan-type rule. As Helen Roche discusses, Mussolini's policy following 1936 changed due to Italy's inclusion among the Axis powers of World War II, specifically with Germany and Japan.³¹ Both of these countries, especially Germany, were hyper-focused on race and on creating a pure and ordered society. To Mussolini, these ideals recalled the moral laws of Augustus, the *leges Iuliae*, and so he began implementing his own similar ideas, which had already been slowly introduced through *romanità* and *latinité*. Fascist policy did not limit itself

³⁰ Nelis (2018), 137.

³¹ Roche, 6.

to economic and foreign issues, but spread to the family and to morality, just like during Augustus' reign.³² For example, in 1927, Mussolini proposed a tax against unmarried men and childless married couples in the hopes of increasing the birthrate, which was similar to Augustus' *Ius Trium Liberorum* and *Lex Papia Poppaea*.³³ There was a specific vision for the ideal fascist individual, just like there was a specific vision for the ideal Roman and just like there was for the ideal Nazi, and Mussolini made sure to pursue this ideal through policy and laws that emulated those of Augustus.

Mussolini's use of Virgil's three works is split between the time prior to Italy's expansion as an empire and the time leading up to and after the expansion. The *Georgics* and the *Eclogues* espouse far different values and ideas from those of the *Aeneid*. Prior to the empire's expansion, Mussolini often used ideas presented in the *Georgics* and the *Eclogues*, specifically their emphasis on pastoral values, agriculture, and peace, to support his fascist policies. Leading up to and after the expansion, Mussolini moved towards the *Aeneid* and its ideas of imperialism, colonialism, and the military. Prior to the expansion (pre-1936), he also equated himself with Caesar, as mentioned previously, as Caesar was the unifier of Rome after the civil wars of 59-55 BCE. But with Mussolini's push towards empire and military power (1936 onward), he found himself to be more like Augustus, the first emperor of Rome. His own personal comparison to Augustus further explains his use of the *Aeneid* during his rule, which will be discussed later.

II. First Major Use of Roman Culture by Mussolini – Three Statues of 1927

The first prominent use of Virgil's works by Mussolini appears on a monument dedicated to Virgil. In 1927, Mussolini had three statues placed in the Piazza Virgiliana in Mantua, Italy.³⁴ The park was developed in the 19th century and had undergone several rounds of renovations

³² Andrea Giardina, "The Fascist Myth of Romanity." *Estudos Avançados*. 22.62 (2008): 65.

³³ Kenneth Scott, "Mussolini and the Roman Empire." *The Classical Journal*. 27.9 (1932): 649.

³⁴ *The Virgil Encyclopedia*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2014, 1351-1360.

with an amphitheater addition and multiple statue dedications by the early 20th century. Around the time of Virgil's bi-millenary celebration (1930), Mussolini added the largest statue of the poet. He stands life-sized, cast in bronze on a Carrara marble podium dressed in robes and with a laurel crown on his head as seen in Figures A and B at the end of this chapter.³⁵ The second statue, significantly smaller, was placed to the left of the Virgil statue. This statue depicts one man, dressed like a Roman soldier, stepping on the stomach of another man, an adversary, as seen in Figure C. It has a quotation from the *Aeneid* engraved on its plinth. The third statue, also smaller, is to the right of Virgil and depicts a very pastoral image of a man playing a pan flute with a woman and child beneath him as seen in Figure D. There are also goats and other farm animals surrounding the people. On its plinth, a quote from the *Eclogues* and another from the *Georgics* are engraved. These three quotations will be discussed below.

Considering the timeline of Mussolini's reign where he focused initially on reunifying Italy and reviving ancient Rome and then later on imperialism, the two secondary statues illustrate perfectly that shift in focus. The pastoral image, with its quotes from the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics*, reflects Mussolini's push towards agriculture, pastoral values, and peace during the early years of his reign, whereas the statue of the conquering soldier reflects Mussolini's later desire for empire and military power. These quotations combined together echo Mussolini's vision for Italy at the time, namely his idealistic and new, fascist Rome. The statues were carved during Mussolini's drive to reunite Italy and solidify it following the destruction of World War One. When Mussolini came to power in 1922, he inherited an Italy in great economic and cultural distress. Like most of Europe, Italy had spent most of its resources on the war. Thus, Mussolini was at a great disadvantage in returning Italy to its former glory, and so his use of

³⁵ *The Virgil Encyclopedia*, 1351-1360.

propaganda was extensive. To analyze Mussolini's use of Virgil's works as propaganda, I will now discuss the two statues and their quotations.

II a. Secondary Statute to the Left of Virgil – *Aeneid* Quotation

The first quotation on the statue with the two soldiers is from the *Aeneid* Book 6, sometimes called the “Roman Mission”. It perfectly encapsulates what Mussolini envisioned for his new fascist Italian empire. These are the words of Anchises to his son Aeneas with which he details what Rome will be in the future. Little did Virgil know that these three lines would be used two thousand years later by a fascist ruler to resurrect ancient Rome.

tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento
(hae tibi erunt artes), pacique imponere morem,
parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.³⁶ (*A.* 6.851-853)

You, Roman, remember to rule the world with power
(these will be your arts), to establish a custom for peace,
To spare the vanquished and to crush the proud.³⁷

As James Zetzel discusses in his essay, *Rome and its Traditions*, Anchises' speech is both prophetic and protreptic, meaning it is an instruction.³⁸ This instruction is seen most clearly by the use of the future imperative *memento* in the first line and the following four infinitives, which read like Anchises' detailed instructions. Aeneas is supposed to take this Roman Mission and apply it to his personal fated duty to find Italy. Anchises foreshadows Rome's future and implies to Aeneas that if he completes his duty and finds Italy and founds Rome, a litany of great events and great people will follow. Obviously, Virgil wrote this speech knowing full well that these events and people did indeed exist and that the Roman Mission was successful. Thus, these prophecies were more historical references that the reader would have understood. These

³⁶ Texts are from the Virgil Oxford Classical Text edited by R. A. B. Mynors unless otherwise noted.

³⁷ Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

³⁸ James Zetzel, “Rome and its traditions.” *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*. Ed. Charles Martindale. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 197.

references, because they are actual fact, not prophecy, allow Anchises' prophecy to become that much stronger and more critical to the success of Rome, even two thousand years after it was written. Anchises' fulfilled prophecy makes it a given that a third Rome will succeed. The Roman Mission is the blueprint for building a successful empire.

Prior to and during Mussolini's reign, it was widely argued that Augustus commissioned the *Aeneid* to be a work of propaganda supporting the Roman Empire.³⁹ Therefore, it is also widely argued that Virgil spends much of his time praising Augustus and his reign, and includes Augustus among Aeneas' descendants. Prior to these three lines describing the overarching Roman Mission, Anchises also discusses in greater detail each of the eras of Rome following Aeneas' conquering of Latium and names the direct descendants of Aeneas. Most importantly, Anchises specifically details Augustus' reign after Caesar's fall.

...hic Caesar et omnis Iuli
progenies magnum caeli ventura sub axem.
hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promitti saepius audis,
Augustus Caesar, divi genus, aurea condet
saecula qui rursus Latio regnata per arva
Saturno quondam, super et Garamantas et Indos
proferet imperium... (A. 6.789-795)

...Here Caesar and all the offspring
Of Julius will come from the great axis of the sky.
This is the man, this is he, whom you so often hear
Promised to you, Augustus Caesar, child of the divine,
Who will build a golden age again in Latium across the fields ruled
By Saturn once, beyond both the Libyans and the Indians
He will bear the empire...

These lines illustrate how far Augustus will extend the Roman Empire and how he will bring Rome into a new age. Anchises equates Augustus with the success of the Roman people and not only makes him a descendant of Aeneas, but deifies him. In these lines, Augustus is

³⁹ Scott, 650. The view on whether or not the *Aeneid* is indeed a work of propaganda is widely debated, with the debate picking up steam following the end of World War II. This debate will be discussed in my second chapter.

described as being born from the sky and being born from a divine race, meaning the gods. Thus, as Zetzel contends, anything Augustus does is “divinely ordained and divinely justified”.⁴⁰

Anchises also refers to the Golden Age of Saturn and states that Augustus will again usher in another Golden Age. Ultimately, according to Anchises, Augustus is the greatest source of Roman achievement. Augustus is the one who will bring Rome the most glory.

Returning to Mussolini’s use of the Roman Mission quotation, by having it engraved on the statue, he foreshadowed his own colonial and imperial goals. As mentioned earlier, Mussolini often equated himself with Caesar and Augustus, who both, like Mussolini, inherited Rome in various stages of distress. Caesar brought Rome back from the civil war and put to rest the tumultuous late Republic, and following Caesar’s death, Augustus inherited a Rome severely divided, both politically and culturally. Just like these two rulers, it was up to Mussolini to bring back the glory days of Rome for Italy following World War One. He did not just want Italy to prosper economically; he wanted Italy to become a superpower. Almost a decade after the second statue was built, in 1936, Mussolini invaded Ethiopia and conquered the Abyssinian Empire. After much work and progress, much like what was detailed in Anchises’ speech, Mussolini had finally made Italy a colonial power once again, thus re-actualizing the Roman Mission two thousand years later.

When considering the identifications of the two figures of the statute, the soldier could be Aeneas and the fallen soldier, Turnus. This brings up the end of Book 12 of the *Aeneid*. The statue itself shows a very proud conqueror vanquishing the fallen, downtrodden enemy, which illustrates the quotation on the plinth well, especially the final line, *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*. This line is almost an exact foreshadowing of the end of the *Aeneid* when Aeneas kills

⁴⁰ Zetzel (1997), 198.

Turnus as an act of revenge.⁴¹ Aeneas considers sparing Turnus when he has pushed Turnus to the ground and has his sword at his throat, thus recalling *parcere subiectis*. But when Aeneas sees Pallas' belt on Turnus, he kills him. Turnus was the *superbos* mentioned in *deballare superbos*, and according to the Roman Mission, it was up to Aeneas to subdue the proud. Turnus gloated about killing Pallas, and so Aeneas had no other choice but to get revenge for Pallas. Aeneas needed to kill Turnus in order to finally establish peace, not just for himself but also for the future of Rome. His killing of Turnus is in keeping with his protection of his family and loyalty towards his family throughout the epic. It would have been out of character for him not to kill Turnus. Some may view him as flouting *pietas*, especially those who read the text as pessimistic, but in actuality he is the epitome of *pietas*.

This focus on family and *pietas* that the statue conveys lines up well with the fascist familial policies of Mussolini. As R.J. Tarrant points out in his essay *Poetry and Power: Virgil's Poetry in Contemporary Context*, Aeneas' killing of Turnus correlates to Augustus' own behavior. In his *Res Gestae*, Augustus himself spoke about avenging his own family and defeating those who tried to destroy the republic.⁴² Just like Aeneas, Augustus has a sense of devotion to his family and to his country. When considering this side of Aeneas and Augustus as well as Mussolini's many Augustan-type policies, it is clear that the focus is on the family. Thus, the fascists created policies that they believed would stabilize not only the moral chaos they viewed happening in Italy but also the economy. Around the time of the creation of the statues, these policies were being implemented. Mussolini takes this a step further and in his 1928 autobiography, he conceives of an Italy under his leadership that is an even greater power and

⁴¹ 12.938-952.

⁴² R. J. Tarrant, "Poetry and power: Virgil's poetry in contemporary context." *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*. Ed. Charles Martindale. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 181.

benefactor of humanity than Virgil's Rome is in this passage.⁴³ This statue and its quote wholly represent Mussolini's vision for imperial fascist Italy.

Mussolini's use of statues to promote his vision for fascist Italy recalls Augustus' use of public monuments as propaganda for his reign. Following the destruction caused by the dissolution of the Roman Republic, Augustus sought to re-unify and re-strengthen Rome. He did this through a systematic "cultural program" that centered not only on enacting new laws promoting morality and religion, but also on building public monuments.⁴⁴ Augustus developed a new language through the construction of monuments to support his revival of Rome. For example, Augustus commissioned the Ara Pacis as part of his revival. Most interestingly, as Paul Zanker states, the Ara Pacis has a specific reference on a frieze to the Golden Age from Virgil's *Eclogues* Book 4: *iam regnat Apollo* "now Apollo rules" (*Ec.* 4.10).⁴⁵ Augustus hoped to usher in another Golden Age during his rule and used the Ara Pacis to promote this. Mussolini used monuments and statues in an identical way to Augustus, hoping to promote his rule and ideals.

Lastly, returning to the original statues in the Piazza Virgiliana, it must also be considered that the physical nature of the statue itself was intentional and another form of Mussolini's use of propaganda and *romanità*. Since the statue is on a plinth high above the ground, viewers of the statue would naturally have to look up at it to grasp its visual message and especially to read the quotation. The height of the statue, which seems to be at least twenty feet, would then create a sense that the statue is in a higher position of authority and speaking down to the native Italians. Thus, Mussolini could be understood as speaking through the statue, almost

⁴³ Benito Mussolini, *My Autobiography*. New York, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928, 131-132. "It is destiny that Rome again takes her place as the city that will be the director of the civilization of all Western Europe. Let us commit the flame of this passion to the coming generations; let us make of Italy one of the nations without which it is impossible to conceive the future history of humanity."

⁴⁴ Paul Zanker. *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1988, 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

as if he himself is Anchises imparting his final instructions, which would then make the “Roman Mission” Mussolini’s mission for his new fascist Italy.

II b. Secondary Statue to the Right of Virgil – *Eclogues* Quotation

To the left of the Virgil statue, the second statue bears *Eclogue* 5.45-7 in which Menalcas, an older poet, praises Mopsus, a younger poet, for his poetry. Mopsus feels that Menalcas is acting arrogant and when Menalcas compares him to Amyntas, a famous pastoral poet, Mopsus replies childishly saying that Amyntas might as well compete with the great Apollo, *quid, si idem certet Phoebum superare canendo* (5.9). By saying this, Mopsus is equating himself to Apollo, a very poor choice given Apollo’s gifts with music and poetry. Menalcas tries to appease him by saying he can sing his song first, which is about the death of Daphnis. It is revealed that Mopsus’ song was newly created after having heard about Menalcas’ song from another person earlier. Menalcas does his song right after he praises Mopsus’. *Eclogue* Book 5 is argued to be an allegorical reference to Caesar with the death and later apotheosis of Daphnis sung by Menalcas.⁴⁶ But the three lines engraved on the plinth are entirely separate from that story and instead are Menalcas’ praises for the actual song itself.

Tale tuum carmen nobis, divine poeta,
quale sopor fessis in gramine, quale per aestum
dulcis aquae saliente sitim restinguere rivo. (*E.* 5.45-47)

Divine poet, your song to me is like sleep
On the grass to the tired, or like in summer
To quench thirst in a dancing stream of sweet water.

These three lines speak to Mopsus’ poetical power. The book as a whole is full of pastoral imagery and these lines especially evoke a sense of calmness and tranquility. Menalcas says that Mopsus’ poetry lulls him to sleep and his songs are sweeter than water. Scholars have

⁴⁶ Wendell Clausen, *A Commentary on Virgil Eclogues*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 152 n4. Many readers and scholars consider Daphnis as a representation of Julius Caesar. However, Clausen argues that poem 5 is much more complex than making Daphnis Caesar.

argued that these lines reference Theocritus' *Idyll* 1 lines 7-8.⁴⁷ Some also argue that they reference Epicureanism and ataraxy, a sense of calmness.⁴⁸ It is also worth noting that in Eclogue 9, Menalcas is dispossessed of his land in land confiscations just like Virgil was during the beginning of Augustus' reign.⁴⁹ Land confiscations and repurposing also occurred during Mussolini's rule, in an attempt to restructure and bolster the Italian agricultural economy. Thus, a parallel begins to form between these two Eclogues and the policies of Mussolini's reign.

None of these ideas, however, speak to why Mussolini would have chosen this quotation to be engraved on the plinth. Since Italy was in a time of great distress and Mussolini was working to make it successful again, the quote could be read as a sort of calming force with its words of sleep and quenching thirst. Its pastoral images recall the values and goals Mussolini was trying to impart to the Italian people, especially those of peace and agriculture. Mussolini could then be interpreted as a calming, civilizing force. During the mid-1920s, Mussolini instituted an economic policy known as the Battle for Grain.⁵⁰ He hoped that this policy would promote self-sufficiency and permit Italy to move away from its dependency on foreign imports, especially grain. This Eclogue's quotation correlates well with Mussolini's grain policy in terms of the pastoral values it promotes. Mussolini could then be using art in Italy's rough times to push his fascist agenda. This statue is another example of Mussolini using ancient Rome as propaganda for his new fascist Italy.

One might also consider that Virgil is here equated with Menalcas and Mussolini with Mopsus. As with the *Aeneid*, Virgil could be using the text to speak to the reader directly. Virgil

⁴⁷ Clausen (1994), 165. Αδιον ὃ ποιμὴν τὸ τεὸν μέλος ἢ τὸ καταχῆς τῆν' ἀπὸ τᾶς πέτρας καταλείβεται ὑπόθεν ὕδωρ (*Theocr.* 1.7-8) "Sweeter, shepherd, is your song than the sound of that water where it pours down from the rock"

⁴⁸ Leah Kronenberg, "Epicurean Pastoral: Daphnis as an Allegory for Lucretius in Vergil's *Eclogues*." *Vergilius*. 62 (2016): 41.

⁴⁹ *The Virgil Encyclopedia*, 785-786.

⁵⁰ Scott, 650.

could then be praising and validating Mussolini, as he is the new poet creating calmness and peace in Italy. As discussed earlier, Virgil's works were used by Augustus to promote his agenda. Thus, a similar phenomenon could be happening here with Mussolini using this quotation to promote his agenda to save Italy. Thus, it is as if Virgil as Menalcas is praising Mussolini as Mopsus for helping Italy.

In addition to Virgil praising Mussolini's pacifying forces through the text, another interpretation of the text must be analyzed. Mopsus' reaction to Menalcas' praise can often be interpreted as rude.⁵¹ He seems to deride the older poet as out-of-date, saying his song had been praised a long time ago, *et ista iam pridem Stimichon laudavit carmina nobis* (E. V.54-55). As cited earlier, he also mocks the compliment Menalcas pays to him and equates himself to Apollo. Mopsus thinks he must show that he is better than the other pastoral poets, especially Menalcas, but Menalcas is not concerned with this and only tries to appease and praise him. As Guy Lee argues in his *Eclogues* commentary, perhaps Virgil wrote this eclogue as a reaction to competition and chaos.⁵² Menalcas, as the older poet, understands the need for calmness and peace, and is trying to impart that wisdom to Mopsus. This is very similar to the idea that, in Mussolini's interpretation, Virgil is praising Mussolini's desire for peace and unification after a long struggle with chaos and disorder. Virgil is trying to teach Mussolini how to revive Italy.

Finally, the specific reference to language and poetry, *carmen*, in this quotation recalls one of Mussolini's tactics for helping bolster Italy, the nationalization of language. Nationalists, and thus fascists, often used language as a means of unifying a country and fortifying its national identity. Prior to the rise of fascism, Italy did not have one common language as each region had its own dialects. Many Italians could not communicate with one another. When Mussolini rose to

⁵¹ Guy Lee, *Virgil The Eclogues*. New York, New York: Penguin Books, 1987, 25.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 24.

power, he immediately outlawed the regional dialects and implemented a common Italian language. As mentioned earlier, the tradition of *latinité* was already present in Italy and all schoolchildren were required to read Virgil and his works, especially the *Aeneid*. This quote could then demonstrate that Mussolini is promoting his nationalization of the Italian language through Virgil. Virgil is allowing Mussolini to create a unifying force through language and poetry. With the common Italian language, the Italian identity became stronger. In a sense, the inscribed quotations broadcast Virgil as Italy's "national" language.

II c. Secondary Statue to the Right of Virgil – *Georgics* Quotation

The last quote on the third statue is from the *Georgics* Book 2's famous passage, the *laudes Italiae*, or celebration of Italy. It is Virgil's greeting to his country.

salve, magna parens frugum, Saturnia tellus, magna uirum (G. 2.173-174)

Hail, great parent of fruit and men, land of Saturn

The *laudes Italiae* (136-176) of Book 2 are a eulogy of Rome and Italy. The passage idealizes Italy and portrays it as the best country in the world. No country is able to compete with Italy. It is no wonder that Mussolini had this quote inscribed because it evoked the Italy that he wanted to achieve two thousand years later, his new fascist Italy. This Virgilian Italy supported Mussolini's views and policies, and most importantly his push for fascism. This is the Italy Mussolini envisioned. The reference to Saturn in this line recalls Saturn's Golden Age, which occurred in Latium following Saturn's expulsion from Olympus by Jupiter.⁵³ In Latium, Saturn established a peaceful world without strife and disorder, an entirely idyllic era. As referenced earlier, in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, Anchises prophesizes that Augustus will usher in a new Golden Age, a time of peace and revival. This quotation must then be recalling this same prophecy of a

⁵³ *The Virgil Encyclopedia*, 1120.

new Golden Age for Italy, only two thousand years later with Mussolini. This would then make Mussolini the *magna parens*.

In addition to heralding the coming Golden Age under Mussolini, these forty lines of the *Georgics* are often read as praising the agriculture of Italy and all the good things Italy provides. As T.S. Eliot wrote in his essay *Virgil and the Christian World*, Virgil espouses in his *Georgics* “the dignity of agricultural labor, and the importance of good cultivation of the soil for the well-being of the state both materially and spiritually”.⁵⁴ The entirety of Book 2 of the *Georgics* focuses on farming and harvesting as well as plants and trees. By praising the fruits of all the fields and trees, Virgil is also praising the work that it takes to harvest the land. The *Georgics*, like the *Aeneid*, were commissioned by Augustus to promote his agenda, that of agrarianism and ruralism. This further explains why Mussolini used the quotation because he viewed himself as the new Augustus, resurrecting Italy from war.⁵⁵ The book promotes a value system that Mussolini pursued prior to his push for empire. There is no drama or strife in this book, only simple praise of labor and agriculture and a return to the former glory of Italy. Like the quote from the *Eclogues*, this quote from the *Georgics* embodies Mussolini’s early goals.

These lines present a highly idealized version of Italy, much in keeping with Mussolini’s vision of his fascist Italy. In the final few lines of Book 2, Virgil describes this era of the world as the Golden Age of Saturn, *aureus hanc uitam in terris Saturnus agebat*, “golden Saturn led this life on earth” (*G.* 538). This again foreshadows the Golden Age that Augustus introduces, and even further foreshadows the age of peace and order Mussolini hopes to bring about for his fascist Italy. The age of Saturn came before Jupiter imposed his hard work and wars. Therefore, these golden ages suggest a time of peace and order, not chaos. The former glory of the Roman

⁵⁴ Ziolkowski (2015), 119.

⁵⁵ Scott, 649-50.

Empire with its great resources and wealth will unify its people two thousand years later. Thus, this quote provides the perfect piece of propaganda for Mussolini's fascist movement.

When looking at this statue as a whole, like the other secondary statue, it must again be considered that its height on the plinth was intentional. Viewers would also have to look up to see the many pastoral figures and to read its two quotations. Like its companion, the height is imposing, as one can see from the picture, and so Mussolini must have deliberately had it built this way in order to amplify his message for peace and ruralism as part of his vision for his new fascist Italy. The statues' heights convey a sense of paternal authority, similar to the *magna parens* quotation, as they stand over the Italian people and communicate Mussolini's plans for Italy, which is unsurprising as Mussolini had been dictator of Italy for several years by their creation in 1927. It should also be noted here that the larger center statue of Virgil has the inscription *A Virgilio La Patria*, which further supports the idea of Virgil embodying the fatherland as Mussolini wanted. Mussolini is the one speaking through these statues to the Italian people and thus is using Virgil as his mouthpiece. Mussolini viewed himself as the savior of Italy after World War One, and these statues and their Virgilian quotations represent this perception.

III. Virgil's Bimillenary in 1930

After the creation of these three statues, Mussolini continued to praise and use Virgil throughout his rule under the tradition of *romanità*. 1930 was the bimillenary celebration of Virgil. Leading up to this celebration, Mussolini referred to 1930 as "the year of Virgil, the poet of Empire and of fields", and also said that Virgil would be celebrated "fascistly".⁵⁶ The Battle for Grain was still ongoing at this time, as were several other fascist economic policies. Virgil's values still fit Mussolini's agenda. As the *L'Enciclopedia Virgiliana* argues, rural and

⁵⁶ *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*. Eds. Edoardo and Duilio Susmel. Florence, Italy: La Fenice, 1951-1963, 24.178.

agricultural life had the “value of an antidote specific to fascist Italy, entrenched in the increase in value of agriculture; and Virgil, the poet of the Georgics, became the symbol of the exit from the economic crisis.”⁵⁷ Simply put, Virgil was a key part of Italy’s success.

Virgil’s bimillenary celebration embodied *romanità* because it combined the ancient with the modern. It provided the occasion for fascist propaganda to join with the Augustan propaganda present in the *Aeneid*. The celebration also allowed Mussolini to bring together Virgil scholars from around Europe, which he used as an opportunity to spread the message of fascism. Because these scholars all praised Virgil at the bimillenary celebration, and Mussolini had equated Virgil with fascism, Mussolini hoped that he could then garner more widespread support for Italy. One speech during the celebration referred to Virgil and his role in *la nuova Italia*.⁵⁸ However, it was not the *la nuova Italia* of Augustus, but it was the new fascist Italy. The speech made a connection between Virgil’s two-thousand-year old words and the new fascist Italy and implied that Virgil himself represented the new fascist Italy. According to Mussolini, Virgil predicted the new fascist Italy as fulfilling the imperial destiny of Rome. The *terza Roma* was finally being realized.

With Virgil and fascism on display to the world during the celebration, Mussolini and the fascists continued to extol Virgilian values and push the tradition of *romanità*. Virgil, in a sense, became a model for the fascist government and its policies. If Italians followed Virgilian values, they would be the light in the world. They would be the world leader. At the time of the celebration, the vast majority of the western world was in dire economic straits following the stock market crash in 1929. Italy suffered, but not nearly as much as others. The fascist economic policies had been somewhat successful in boosting the economy, especially with the

⁵⁷ L’Enciclopedia Virgiliana, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1984-1991, 469.

⁵⁸ Charles Fantazzi, “Homage to Virgil.” *Vergilius* 29 (1983): 1. The speech in 1931, entitled “Virgilio e lo spirito della nuova Italia” was by professor P.E. Santangelo.

push for agriculture and ruralism. Thus, when the eyes of the world turned to Italy for the celebration, Mussolini saw that he could show how successful his fascism was.

As Andrea Giardina argues in his essay *The Fascist Myth of Romanity*, “the Virgil bimillenary provided the occasion for fascist propaganda to build a suggestive crossing between humanism and economics, between ancient and modern”.⁵⁹ To Mussolini, fascism had found the correct balance between ancient and modern necessary for uniting Italy and strengthening it. The tradition of *romanità* was a success. In addition to the celebration itself, Mussolini issued nine mail stamps engraved with scenes from the *Aeneid*, *Georgics*, and *Eclogues*.⁶⁰ By the end of the celebration, Mussolini was well on his way to imbuing Italian culture with ancient Roman propaganda.

When considering Mussolini’s use of Virgil for his own means, it becomes clear that Virgil can be easily manipulated. The values presented in his works are so varied that they can be construed and especially misconstrued for whatever is needed. As Giardina writes, “Virgil, as poet of the country life, was the ancient soul of fascist ruralism; as celebrator of the Roman domination, he was also the prophet of the power wish of the Mussolinian Italy; as poet of the pacification after the disaster of the civil wars, he was, ultimately, the mirror of the Italy pacified by fascism”.⁶¹ Virgil embodied many of the values that Mussolini wanted in his fascist Italy. It must also be recognized that Virgil was born in Mantua, which is in northern Italy, but he also spent a significant amount of time in Rome and even lived in southern Italy. He was the ideal poet for a unified Italy.

⁵⁹ Giardina, 63.

⁶⁰ *The Virgil Encyclopedia*, 1213-1214. The stamps included scenes from *A.* 3.477, *A.* 6.851, *A.* 7.120, *G.* 2.173, *G.* 2.458–59, *G.* 2.523, *A.* 3.524, *E.* 7.49, and *A.* 11.419.

⁶¹ Giardina, 59.

Mussolini's idea of *romanità* also changed over the course of his rule. As mentioned earlier, Mussolini's reign had a distinct shift during the late 1920s and early 1930s. From his rise to power in 1922, he spent his time unifying Italy and strengthening it. Then, he changed his sights. He wanted to expand the Italian empire. As Jan Nelis argues, *romanità* spread through all parts of Italian society and government as Mussolini found what parts of ancient Rome fit his current goals and twisted them into propaganda, all in a highly orchestrated way.⁶² Everything he utilized had its specific purpose for furthering his fascist Italy.

IV. Mussolini's Push for Empire in 1936

Thus, when Mussolini began his push to conquer Ethiopia and the Abyssinian Empire in the early 1930s, his tone changed. He changed *romanità* to be about military power and imperialism. He began to equate himself with Augustus. The *Aeneid* became the new focus. On May 9th 1936, Mussolini got his wish. After conquering Ethiopia, he declared, "Italy at last has her empire".⁶³ He continued his declaration saying, "This is an empire of peace, because Italy wants peace for herself and for all, and goes to war only when forced. It is an empire of civilization and humanity".⁶⁴ This quote is highly reminiscent of the Roman Mission with its references to conquering nations and bringing peace. Mussolini believed he had to fulfill Rome's destiny and to expand the empire. After his success, he constructed stone maps in the Forum depicting the various expansions of the Roman Empire, including his own.⁶⁵ Even further

⁶² Nelis (2018), 140.

⁶³ "Mussolini storms Abyssinia: report in the Observer, May 1936." *The Guardian*, 5 Sept. 2009, www.theguardian.com/world/2009/sep/05/italy-abyssinia-second-world-war. In Abyssinia, on May 9th 1936, Mussolini proclaimed, "Italy at last has her empire. The land and the people of Abyssinia have passed under the full and entire sovereignty of Italy, and Italy is ready to defend Abyssinia against anyone with her blood. Italy's empire is fascist, because it bears sins of the will and power of Rome – because this is the goal towards which for 14 years our will was bent. The Italian people have created with their blood an empire which they will make fecund with their blood. This is an empire of peace, because Italy wants peace for herself and for all, and goes to war only when forced. It is an empire of civilisation and humanity for the Abyssinian population."

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Kenneth Scott, 657.

praising his empire, in 1937, he made a speech about the reappearance of the empire on Rome's seven hills.⁶⁶ Considering his drive for empire and his minor success, it becomes clear that Mussolini did indeed read Virgil as favorable towards imperialism and military power and the *Aeneid* especially as a pro-empire work of Augustan propaganda.

The beauty of Virgil's works is that they can be interpreted in countless ways, which is what allowed Mussolini and even his counterparts in Germany, namely Hitler and the Nazis,⁶⁷ to utilize them for their political movements. However, after the end of World War II and the dissolution of Fascism and Nazism, a different reading of the *Aeneid* surfaced in America, one that was far more dark and negative. Perhaps this darker reading was a response to the horrors of war or fears of new wars. Or it was simply from a more nuanced understanding of the text from close readings. Whatever the cause, American scholars uncovered a new pessimistic voice of Virgil that ran entirely counter to Mussolini's optimistic reading. To Mussolini, Virgil was the perfect fascist poet, but The Harvard School of Thought begged to differ.

⁶⁶ Fantazzi (1983), 1.

⁶⁷ Ziolkowski (2015), 61. As cited earlier in this chapter, Adolf Hitler wrote in his book *Mein Kampf* about Ancient Rome being a model of empire.



Figure A⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Virtusincertus. "Statue of Virgil." *Flickr*, 1 Nov. 2009, www.flickr.com/photos/79346113@N00/4094578339.



Figure B⁶⁹

⁶⁹ FranzK. "Piazza Virgiliana a Mantova2." *Wikimedia Commons*, 6 May 2011, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Piazza_Virgiliana_a_Mantova2.jpg.



Figure C⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Sebastia Giralt. "Monumento a Virgilio, Poesia eroica, Mantova." *Flickr*, 1 Jan 2003, www.flickr.com/photos/sebastiagiralt/226516706/in/photolist-ct5XeG-oy7rDD-RtEBu7-ownXu1-2xiwSY-ouHXrF-2xiyf1-7VDwjZ-2xizpf-8Mjtb8-owrEay-oeQHng-othcKN-7PxEjE-m1Xwu-m1Xws-m1Xww-5kCMEe-oseR1i-owojvT-QPkyyg-owo3fd-3Gxmk4-RSpzE8-o6SbKL-26gBce-QLQhWW-y8kd6s-yqvMwV-ypATE3-y966ND-y9Kooh-of2R9g-oweArq-uWN8gn-yoUeR6-ow2qof-yoZz18-y7VwFa-RtEtVE-RtECVd-N5rqRr-oeqyk7-yop7GV-oenH9W-yqf3z2-y6D4pJ-oeSsrn-nbLmST-7TJgnB/.



Figure D⁷¹

⁷¹ Sebastia Giralt. "Monumento a Virgilio, Poesia pastorale, Mantova." *Flickr*, 1 Jan 2003, www.flickr.com/photos/sebastiagiralt/226516710/in/photolist-ct5XeG-oy7rDD-RtEBu7-ownXu1-2xiwSY-ouHXrF-2xiyf1-7VDwjZ-2xizpf-8Mjtb8-owrEay-oeQHng-othcKN-7PxEjE-m1Xwu-m1Xws-m1Xww-5kCMEe-oseR1i-owojvT-QPkyg-owo3fd-3Gxmk4-RSpzE8-o6SbKL-26gBce-QLQhWW-y8kd6s-yqvMwV-ypATE3-y966ND-y9KooH-of2R9g-oweArq-uWN8gn-yoUeR6-ow2qof-yoZz18-y7VwFa-RtEtVE-RtECVd-N5rqRr-oeqyk7-yop7GV-oenH9W-yqf3z2-y6D4pJ-oeSsrn-nbLmST-7TJgnB/.

Chapter Two: The Rise of The Harvard School of Thought

As discussed in the previous chapter, Mussolini manipulated Virgil and his works to support the new Italian fascist movement. He viewed Virgil's works as favorable to imperialism and military power. This, however, is just one way to read Virgil's works. Virgil's work clearly had, and continue to inspire, political leanings, as I discussed in my first chapter, but following the world wars, readers started to see something new in his *Aeneid*. In this chapter, I will analyze what this new reading was, specifically its dark and pessimistic aspects, why this dark reading emerged, and why its occurrence was not a reaction to the Vietnam War as many believe.

I. Historical and Literary Context

It was not until the years following World War II that the perception of the *Aeneid* began to shift away from it being pro-empire and pro-war, as seen in the previous chapter with Mussolini and the Italian fascist movement, to anti-empire and anti-war. Leading up to and during World War II, scholarship on Virgil's works was having a revival. At this time, Virgilian scholarship was still largely produced by European scholars and thus had a more Euro-centric approach. German scholars produced the majority of the scholarship up until the late 1920s when scholarship from England, Italy, and, to a lesser extent, the United States began to be published. This timeline coincides with Europe's recovery from the devastating effects of World War I, as it would have disrupted the lines of communication between scholars across the Western world.⁷²

Before continuing on with the discussion of the shift in perception of the *Aeneid*, first it must be noted that another interesting shift occurred during the start of the 20th century. Virgilian scholarship started to focus more on the *Aeneid* as a work of literature and its meaning and message (via analysis and close reading) as opposed to the predominant early focus (prior to the

⁷² Harrison (1990), 3.

20th century) on commentaries and the language itself.⁷³ This method of closely analyzing the text itself for meaning continued throughout the 20th century, which allowed for a much deeper and more nuanced understanding of the *Aeneid* and its meaning. In Europe, however, scholars throughout the duration of World War II and some even after the war maintained their reading of the *Aeneid* as a “classic vindication of the European world-order, happily consonant with Roman imperialism and the achievements and political settlement of Augustus”.⁷⁴ The *Aeneid* had become a classic and a foundational text for the West.

In 1945, right at the end of World War II, the tide changed. At this time, a new approach to literary criticism was gaining popularity called New Criticism. This movement opposed reading texts through the lens of historical and biographical context and instead promoted reading texts as an independent unit of meaning.⁷⁵ New Criticism approached texts through close readings of specific sections and looked for imagery, symbols and paradoxes, or even ambiguity and tension to find meaning. Early 20th century scholarship of the *Aeneid* also used this form of analysis, but it only began to gain momentum following World War II. Whether or not these Virgilian scholars (namely Wendell Clausen, W.R. Johnson, Adam Parry, and Michael Putnam) considered themselves a part of New Criticism, their approaches nevertheless were similar.

The horrific events of and fallout from World War II created much stronger tensions between those who were pro-imperialism and pro-war and those who were anti-imperialism and anti-war. There was a seismic shift around the world, not just for Virgilian and other academic scholars. In turn, many scholars no longer wanted to support military imperialism and war outright. Different, darker views of the *Aeneid* began to appear in this time period following the

⁷³ Harrison (1990), 2. In 1903, German scholars Richard Heinze and Eduard Norden published works that marked the start of this new method of literary analysis of the *Aeneid*. Their works, *Vergils epische Technik* and *Aeneid 6* respectively, followed the traditional view of the *Aeneid*, that of pro-empire.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁵ “New Criticism.” *Britannica*, www.britannica.com/art/New-Criticism.

end of World War II. As this chapter will show, scholars in America, especially, started perceiving the *Aeneid* as dark and tragic. It is interesting to note the distinct difference between the interpretations of political leaders like Mussolini and those of American scholars. Mussolini's understanding of Virgil's works is far more traditional and optimistic, which stems from a less nuanced and in turn superficial reading of the works' complexities, making it more of an appropriation of the texts. The American scholars' pessimistic readings, as will be discussed at length in this chapter, stem from a much more multifaceted and close reading. These scholars acknowledge the intricacies of the *Aeneid* and how they work outside of politics. This darker view among American scholars ultimately led to what is known as The Harvard School of Thought, which will be discussed later on and at length in this chapter.

II. Catalyzing Forces for the Rise of the Pessimistic Reading or What Led to The Harvard School of Thought

The scholar S. J. Harrison in his essay "Some Views of the *Aeneid* in the Twentieth Century" argues that it was the German scholar Viktor Pöschl's book *Die Dichtkunst Vergils*, also known as *The Art of Vergil*, which was published in 1950, that was the catalyst of this shift in perception. Pöschl's focus on imagery and symbolism in the *Aeneid* allowed him to create two separate readings: one of support for the *Aeneid* as a foundational text for the West and its values and another of sadness and grief for the victims and brutality of war. His perception of the text as being a foundational text for Western civilization was common at this time. The English writer T.S. Eliot wrote an influential essay in 1945 entitled "What is a Classic?" where he proclaimed that "the classic of all Europe is Virgil".⁷⁶ To Eliot, a classic could only occur when a civilization and its language were mature, meaning they had a rich and complex history behind them.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Eliot, 70.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 54-55.

Virgil understood the nuanced history of Rome and the Latin language, and that led him to the status of “classic”. German scholar Theodore Haecker also labeled Virgil as “the father of the West”, which is also the title of Haecker’s book.⁷⁸

At the time of Pöschl’s writing, Germany was in the process of rebuilding following the end of World War II. There was a need for support of German rebuilding and revival, and the *Aeneid* with its focus on order and purpose, shown through Aeneas’ divinely ordained journey to establish Rome, fit that bill. As Pöschl wrote at the beginning of his book, “There is more at stake here than just the question of Vergil; it concerns the foundations of western civilization. We are seeking ties of communication to bind us together. We must therefore re-establish a firm place for the *Aeneid* in our cultural consciousness as one of the bibles of the Western world”.⁷⁹

Many scholars, Harrison included, view Pöschl’s book to be only positive and in support of Western civilization, but they miss his darker underlying reading. In his first chapter “Basic Themes”, Pöschl speaks about the darkness and tragedy present in the text. He refers to the image of Turnus as a “dark demon of passion” and asserts that the deepest tragedy of all is that characters such as Dido and Turnus, and even the gods, “loved too much”.⁸⁰ It is even true for Aeneas, who, as Pöschl argues, was strongly motivated by love. Although Pöschl writes that Aeneas was a “shining spiritual and moral power”,⁸¹ he too is overcome by love, as is seen at the end of the epic. Like many of the characters, he is transformed by his love, which translates into grief, and in the end, he finally acts as a human controlled by his emotions. Prior to the end of Book 12, Aeneas was constantly beleaguered by his emotions, but he never bent to them. As Virgil wrote in Book 3, Aeneas pressed down the deep grief in his heart, *premit altum corde*

⁷⁸ Haecker.

⁷⁹ Viktor Pöschl, *The Art of Vergil: Image and Symbol in the Aeneid*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1962, 12.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

dolorem (A. 3.315). He continued on and followed his fate and duty to found Rome. Pöschl contends that although Aeneas and the *Aeneid* are a metaphor for Roman history and they support Augustus' goals, they nevertheless must both be considered through the lens of history and the lens of humanity. Aeneas is clearly a hero with *pietas* and a *magnitudo animi* who has to fulfill his destiny no matter what, but he is also a human who is swayed by emotion. The *Aeneid* is not simply a political manifesto. The *Aeneid* is a "poem of humanity".⁸² Pöschl's reading seems to fall into the "ambivalent" category as he uncovers both positives and negatives in the text. To Pöschl, there is no pure victory for Aeneas or for the later Roman Empire.

Pöschl's book garnered a mixed response from scholars upon publication. Some viewed his book as "belaboring the obvious, oversubtle, and fanciful".⁸³ But others, like G. E. Duckworth stated that the book was "the most significant book of recent years on the *Aeneid*".⁸⁴ Harrison argues that Pöschl's book was the first prominent work to have an influence on U.S. Virgilian scholarship. He contends that it was Pöschl's close reading that allowed for The Harvard School of Thought to rise. But others argue that it was Pöschl's underlying argument concerning the darker tragic voice present. As Pöschl wrote, "the tragic force of the last half of the *Aeneid* has not been recognized".⁸⁵ Pöschl's book provided another possible way to read the *Aeneid* outside of the traditional imperialist approach. One scholar in particular, Joseph Farrell, views Pöschl's book as atonement for World War II, whether personal or national, due to its bifurcated approach.⁸⁶ Namely, it acknowledged the success of empire, which is the traditional view of the *Aeneid* and a very German approach, but at the same time also acknowledged the

⁸² Pöschl, 24.

⁸³ Allan Gillingham, "Viktor Poeschl's 'Die Dichtkunst Virgils.'" *Vergilius*. 5 (1959): 27.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸⁵ Pöschl, 138.

⁸⁶ Farrell, "The Vergilian Century." *Vergilius* 47 (2001): 12-13.

often-ignored tragedies, specifically of foreigners, namely Dido and Turnus, which is a very non-imperialist approach.

This new second reading helped lead to what became known as the two possible readings of the *Aeneid*: optimistic and pessimistic. Optimistic readings focused on the pro-empire, pro-imperialism, and pro-Augustan aspects of the poem. In these readings, Aeneas was a flawless hero and acted appropriately and with confidence in order to succeed in his end goal of founding Rome. The text was a celebration of empire, imperialist ideology, nationalism, and war. The pessimistic reading focused on the anti-empire, anti-imperialism, and anti-Augustan aspects of the poem. Aeneas was a highly flawed hero with human emotions who succumbed to violence, barbarianism, and uncertainty, especially at the end of the epic. The pessimistic reading centered on all of the human failings and tragedies present in the text. Except for Brooks Otis, few American scholars at the time read the *Aeneid* as anything but pessimistic. Whereas the vast majority of European scholars still held fast to the optimistic reading.

This pessimistic reading became the concentration of The Harvard School of Thought, which, as briefly mentioned earlier, started gaining traction in the 1950s and early 1960s. American scholars Adam Parry, Wendell Clausen, and Michael Putnam were three of the main scholars that contributed to the Harvard School of Thought.⁸⁷ Their three works will be discussed at length later in this chapter. The Harvard School of Thought was a direct reaction to the traditional optimistic view promoted by the Germans and other European scholars. They argued that there was a second voice alongside the voice of the glory of empire and war. In his 1963 essay “The Two Voices of Virgil’s *Aeneid*”, Adam Parry wrote that the text had a “public voice

⁸⁷ Adam Parry, “The Two Voices of Virgil’s *Aeneid*”, 1963. Wendell Clausen, “An Interpretation of the *Aeneid*”, 1964. Michael C. J. Putnam, *The Poetry of the Aeneid*, 1965.

of triumph, and a private voice of regret”.⁸⁸ These scholars read in the *Aeneid* that there was a dark side of Aeneas’ success, as experienced not only by the tragic figures of Dido and Turnus, but also by Aeneas himself. As Clausen wrote, the plot of the *Aeneid* was “a long history of defeat and loss” and a pyrrhic victory for Aeneas.⁸⁹

This dual view of the *Aeneid* begs the question: what caused the emergence of The Harvard School of Thought? Again, it is clear that there is some direct influence from the events and costs of World War II as well as from the new literary analysis method of New Criticism. However, many perceive The Harvard School of Thought to be directly related to the Vietnam War as the publications of their works fall during the time period starting in 1964 in which the United States drastically escalated its involvement in the Vietnam War. This is not the case though according to the scholars Ernst Schmidt and Joseph Farrell.

As Ernst Schmidt argues in his essay “The Meaning of Vergil’s *Aeneid*”, which was published in 2001, “the synchronism of the publication of [Adam Parry’s] essay with the widening of the U.S. engagement in Vietnam, and the unease caused thereby, points to significant coincidence.”⁹⁰ It is only a coincidence. According to Schmidt, the ideas presented in Parry’s article and other articles and books published during this time period stem from something different. Schmidt argues that Parry and The Harvard School of Thought are far more focused on the loss of life and the tragedy present in the text. They see a Virgil who creates pathos for the dead and the vanquished, and even the physical places conquered by Aeneas. The places “are the true victims of Aeneas’ war...[and] Virgil calls on us to weep for what to his

⁸⁸ Parry, 79.

⁸⁹ Wendell Clausen, “An Interpretation of the *Aeneid*.” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*. 68 (1964): 143.

⁹⁰ Ernst Schmidt, “The Meaning of Vergil’s ‘Aeneid’: American and German Approaches.” *The Classical World* 94.2 (2001): 145-171, 155.

mind made an earlier Italy fresh and true”.⁹¹ Schmidt argues that Parry, Clausen, and Putnam’s works stem from an understanding of universal human failings and tragedies.⁹² They weep for the destruction caused by wars. They too see “the good old days” of America being lost not only to modern technology, but even more so to American imperialism. The creation of empire destroys everything, not just the people.

According to Schmidt, the Vietnam War served only to contribute to the pessimistic readings of The Harvard School of Thought. It was not the cause. There was an already growing skepticism about imperialism, world powers, also known as strong states, and war following the end of World War II. The skepticism only increased as the American involvement in the Vietnam War grew. The events of the 1960s and 1970s created “deep-seated and continuing skepticism about whether centralized bureaucratic institutions can fulfill the ideals of liberty, equality, and democratic institutions that historically have defined American nationality”.⁹³ As it actually happened, the creation of the American federal government was a direct response to the colonialism and imperialism of Europe, leading all the way back to the 16th century. As Schmidt describes, the federal government was meant to be a limited government that focused on the individual and not on the state.⁹⁴ Its purpose was to prevent any drive for imperialism or nationalism from forming. Thus, when Americans saw their government shifting towards imperialism and world power status following World War II, they responded with mistrust.

Schmidt argues that these views of the American government, both past and present, influenced how the *Aeneid* was read. In his essay, he writes, “the Americans cannot but identify the Augustan state with a strong state to which they are hostile, and they express doubts about

⁹¹ Parry, 68.

⁹² Schmidt, 155.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

the Roman Empire because of their experience of contemporary American imperialism”.⁹⁵

Because of the atrocities of World War II committed by Hitler and Stalin, Schmidt contends that Americans may have no longer been able to even relate with even Aeneas as a heroic figure who himself started his journey in tragedy. Americans may have sympathized more with the actual tragic figures of the war, like Turnus and Dido, and may have viewed Augustus not as the savior of Rome and creator of a new Golden Age, but as a tyrant and a destructive force. Without Hitler and Stalin, this pessimistic view would not have materialized. As Schmidt writes, “The politicized sensitivity [of that era] kindled that spark”.⁹⁶

Joseph Farrell argues for the rise of The Harvard School of Thought in a similar vein as Ernst Schmidt. He contends there are several aspects to consider, starting with the literary theory of New Criticism. New Critical readings of Virgil, he states, started in earnest in 1950 with the publication of Bernard Knox’s essay “The Serpent and the Flame”. This essay looked at how the imagery of snakes and flames in the similes and metaphors of Book 2 of the *Aeneid* parallels the description of the fall of Troy, a very dark and horrific moment, and also correlated with the rebirth of Troy in Rome later in the book and later on in the epic. Knox argues that Virgil uses the images of serpents and flames contrastingly in this book to portray this rebirth. To Knox, Virgil portrays the fall of Troy “as the action of the serpent”.⁹⁷ Knox posits that Virgil’s violent imagery of Laocoön and his sons’ deaths by the serpent creates an echo for the reader who will always recall this scene throughout the book.⁹⁸

Virgil then creates tension between the image of the serpent that kills Laocoön and his sons and the fire that then ravages Troy with the image of the prophetic flames that appear on

⁹⁵ Schmidt, 157.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁹⁷ Bernard Knox, “The Serpent and the Flame: The Imagery of the Second Book of the *Aeneid*.” *The American Journal of Philology*. 71.4 (1950): 384.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 383.

Ascanius' hair, which are described as serpent-like. The serpents and flames at the beginning of the book are violent and aggressive⁹⁹, but the flame at the end of the book is a *sanctos ignis* (*A.* 2.686) and *innoxia* (*A.* 2.683).¹⁰⁰ It should also briefly be mentioned that Knox himself states that the images of the serpents and flames are “ambivalent”.¹⁰¹ Their uncertainty further adds to the tension in this book and to the epic as a whole, and also highlights the many ways in which this work can be interpreted. As Farrell writes, Knox's analysis and interpretation of these images is New Criticism.¹⁰² Knox took the images of seemingly minor things and made them symbols and then plot devices. Farrell argues that this essay, and the rise of New Criticism, helped lead to the dual readings of the *Aeneid* due to its close reading of the text.¹⁰³ It provided a new method for scholars to analyze the *Aeneid* and uncover new readings.

In addition to the influence of New Criticism, Farrell states that it is necessary to consider the politics at hand during this era, especially following the end of World War II. Like Schmidt, he acknowledges the events and fallout of both World Wars. Great empires collapsed. New empires tried to form. Dictators rose to power. Weak states were exploited by strong states. The threat of imperialism spread across Europe. Even when World War II ended, the Cold War began, which was simply a proxy war that mimicked the conflict between the Allied and Axis powers from World War II. Although no physical fighting occurred post World War II, imperialism and expansionism was not over between the two world superpowers of the US and the USSR. It should also be noted that that Korean War also started shortly after the conclusion

⁹⁹ In lines 199-227 of Book 2 of the *Aeneid*, the serpents that kills Laocoon and his sons are described with violent and grotesque imagery as they encircle the boys and eat their limbs. *iamque arva tenebant ardentisque oculos* *suffecti sanguine et igni sibila lambebant linguis vibrantibus ora* (209-211).

¹⁰⁰ Knox, 396.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 380.

¹⁰² Farrell, 20.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 15.

of World War II. Thus, according to Farrell, given the climate at hand, it is not surprising that the rise of the pessimistic reading occurred.

Farrell asserts that because of World War II, the *Aeneid* could no longer be read as the foundational text of the West. Hitler's and Mussolini's use and manipulation of Virgil and his texts for their political movements deterred many readers from doing so following the collapses of their empires and political movements. The *Aeneid* was no longer a unifying force for culture, but instead a dividing force. Like Schmidt argued, without Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin, the pessimistic reading would have never happened. Farrell makes a clear distinction, however, between the pro-imperialist and anti-imperialist views prior to the end of World War II and the pro-imperialist and anti-imperialist views after. To him, they are different as prior to the end of World War II, empires were constantly being created and destroyed via wars that were fought because of pro- and anti- imperialist views. Following World War II, only the Soviet Union and the United States remained as superpowers and the question was no longer about imperialism, but about the geopolitical goals of the two.

As Farrell states, the problem between the two superpowers was not concerning the existence and expansion of empires. Rather, it was about how the superpowers' geopolitical goals should be achieved. The ultimate question, according to Farrell, was whether or not the war between the Soviet Union and United States would lead to the destruction of the entire world. Farrell argues that there were two ways for geopolitical goals to be achieved following World War II, either through military or pacific means. This dual method then led to a rise in binary readings of the *Aeneid*, which, as Farrell argues, mirrored the geopolitical debate at hand. As Farrell summarizes, the two readings, optimistic and pessimistic, arose because of the competing

ideologies and geopolitical goals of the Cold War. Optimists supported advancing superpower status through war, whereas pessimists supported pacifism.

In sum, Harrison, Schmidt, and Farrell provide three perspectives on the rise of The Harvard School of Thought. To them, the rise either stemmed from the new literary criticism method of New Criticism, the conclusion of World War II, or the formation and complexities of the Cold War.

III. Scholarly Interpretations from The Harvard School of Thought

Considering these three scholarly perspectives on the rise of The Harvard School of Thought and the pessimistic reading as well as the European School's continuation of the optimistic reading, I will now discuss several works of American scholarship from the 1960s and 1970s, namely those of Adam Parry (1963), Wendell Clausen (1964), Michael Putnam (1965), and W.R. Johnson (1976). Through these texts, I will look at the incidences of the optimistic and pessimistic readings, while also considering the sections of the *Aeneid* that these scholars analyze. So as to put the focus on Virgil's text rather than the scholar, I have chosen to structure the following analysis of scholarship around the passages from Virgil's text rather than give a summary of each scholar's approach. If multiple authors analyze the same passages or book, as is the case for Books 4, 6, and 12, I will go chronologically by each author's publication year. The last section will cover passages that these authors mentioned and did not cover in extensive detail, but yet are still relevant to their interpretations of the *Aeneid*.

III a. Book Four

As mentioned earlier, much of the pessimistic reading of the *Aeneid* focuses on the sufferings of war and its victims. Both Adam Parry and W.R. Johnson anchor much of their readings of the *Aeneid* on these victims, namely Dido and Turnus. Book Four features

prominently in both of their analyses. As Adam Parry sets forth in his article “The Two Voices of Virgil’s *Aeneid*”, Aeneas is “always the victim of forces greater than himself”.¹⁰⁴ Parry, like many scholars, notes that throughout the *Aeneid*, Virgil drew many parallels between Homer’s *Odyssey* and *Iliad* and his own *Aeneid*. The main comparison Parry finds is between Odysseus and Aeneas, which is highly evident as the first six books of the *Aeneid* illustrate Aeneas’ wanderings, similar to Odysseus’ wanderings. To Parry, Odysseus was a true hero that had all the qualities necessary to be a hero, namely honor, love, and loyalty to his family and wife as well as a personal drive to get home. However, even though Aeneas is cast in the role of hero, he is missing these heroic qualities. He is reluctant and struggles to claim his heroic role. It takes him six books to finally accept his fate, which is not even personally motivated like it was for Odysseus. Aeneas is not fighting to get back to his family or to save his wife, but has to found Rome, a monumental task. Parry describes Aeneas as a “bearer of too vast a destiny”.¹⁰⁵

For the sake of this destiny, throughout the first six books, Aeneas is continually stripped of his personal connections. He becomes an agent for the gods, not an agent for himself. His lack of agency even strips him of his ability to be a man, not just a hero, as the gods continually make decisions for him. As Parry states, “Aeneas cannot live his own life”.¹⁰⁶ However, in Book Four, Aeneas has one final chance to assert himself as a man and as the hero of his own story. When he comes upon Carthage and meets Dido, he could have stayed there. He was not like Odysseus who had a wife to get home to. Aeneas had nothing tethering him to anywhere. But, he fails. Even when he gets betrothed to Dido, an act that should have bound him to her forever, he abandons her due to the intervention of Jupiter and Mercury. As Aeneas says to Dido, “I follow Italy not by my own will”. *Italiam non sponte sequor* (*A.* 4.361). The irony of this scene is that

¹⁰⁴ Parry, 114.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Pious Aeneas, as he is so often called, cannot even maintain any piety in his own personal life.¹⁰⁷ This breaking of his bonds with Dido is the final nail in his non-hero coffin. Parry also argues that Virgil purposefully made Aeneas look like a horrible traitor and Dido look like a true heroine. The reader feels huge sympathy for Dido as she is abandoned and finally kills herself. This scene will be discussed shortly through the lens of W. R. Johnson.

As Parry so succinctly writes, “Aeneas is not master of himself, but servant of an abstract destiny”.¹⁰⁸ In his article, Parry identifies Aeneas with several historical figures, specifically Mark Antony and, unsurprisingly, Augustus.¹⁰⁹ His identification with Mark Antony derives from his stay in Carthage with Dido. Dido would then be Cleopatra, who as history shows was a major detriment to Rome. However, once Aeneas leaves Dido, he becomes Augustus. He loses his chance at love for a shot at a better world (Rome). Parry argues that although Virgil “supports the public glory of Roman achievement, the establishment of peace and order and civilization” through his “supposed panegyric of Augustus”, nevertheless, at the same time he also emphasizes the horrors and immense losses of war.¹¹⁰ Virgil understood that “more is lost than just blood, sweat, and tears [because] human freedom, love, and personal loyalty are lost” in the pursuit of destiny.¹¹¹ But, as Parry sees through Book Four, destiny, i.e. the Roman State, is more important than any human.

Parry sees Aeneas’ political goals as supplanting human suffering. Aeneas barely gives Dido a second thought before departing Carthage. Parry’s analysis of line 361, *Italiam non sponte sequor* (*A.* 4.361), shows the reader an Aeneas who, if he had any control, would never have left Troy. As Parry hypothesizes, through this line, it is as if Aeneas is saying to Dido, “I

¹⁰⁷ Parry, 120.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 115, 120.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 120.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

would never have fallen in love with you in the first place”.¹¹² By saying this, Aeneas invalidates Dido’s feelings even more. He has no concept of the suffering his destiny and impiety is causing, and even tries to reconcile with Dido in Book Six when he sees her ghost and finally begins to understand exactly what his actions caused (her suicide). From his analysis of Book Four, Parry strongly emphasizes the darkness he finds in the *Aeneid*. Viewing Aeneas as a highly flawed character that leaves destruction in his wake, he refuses to even identify him as a hero.

W.R. Johnson reads Book Four in a similar way. In his book, the aptly named *Darkness Visible*, Johnson argues that the true meaning of the *Aeneid* is revealed between the lines. There is a “softer emotional mode that...struggles against madness, anger, profound ignorance, and malevolent darkness” present in the book.¹¹³ This struggle is evident in Book Four, especially with Dido’s death. As Johnson points out, the reader’s attention is swiftly diverted away from Dido’s death. Virgil suddenly ends his description of Dido’s death and introduces Juno and Isis:

ter revoluta toro est oculisque errantibus alto
 quaesivit caelo lucem ingemuitque reperta.
 Tum Iuno omnipotens longum miserata dolorem
 difficilisque obitus Irim demisit Olympo
 quae luctantem animam nexosque resolveret artus.

...

ergo Iris croceis per caelum roscida pennis
 mille trahens varios adverso sole colores
 devolat et supra caput astitit. 'hunc ego Diti
 sacrum iussa fero teque isto corpore solvo':
 sic ait et dextra crinem secat, omnis et una
 dilapsus calor atque in ventos vita recessit.

(A. 4.691-695,700-705)

Three times she rolled onto the bed and with her wandering eyes
 She sought the light from the high sky and having found it she groaned.
 Then all-powerful Juno having pitied the long grief
 And hard death sent down from Olympus Iris
 Who was to loosen the struggling spirit and bound limbs.

...

¹¹² Parry, 119.

¹¹³ W. R. Johnson, *Darkness Visible: A Study of Vergil's Aeneid*. Berkley, California: University of California Press, 1976, 50.

Therefore, dewy Iris flew through the sky on saffron wings
Dragging a thousand varying colors over the facing sun
And she stood above the head. “So having been ordered
I bear this sacred thing to Dis and I loosen you from that body”:
So she speaks and cuts the hair with her right hand, and all
The warmth slipped from her simultaneously and the life withdrew to the winds.

There is a distinct separation between Dido’s death ending in line 692 and Juno appearing in 693. Virgil leaves no room for mourning Dido and instead redirects the reader to focus on Juno’s intrusion. As Johnson argues, this distances the reader from Dido, which is unique as most of Book Four is read through Dido’s eyes.¹¹⁴ The reader feels the emotions that Dido feels. They feel slighted and abandoned when Aeneas leaves. According to Johnson, they view Dido as the heroine and Aeneas as the cad. But when Virgil so deftly switches the point of view in the final twenty lines of the book, Dido’s death is lost. Her significance is lost too. Until line 693, the language of Dido’s death is very pitiful and invokes pathos and the reader is seeing it through her and her sister Anna’s eyes, but with the sudden intrusive *tum* of line 693, that pathos is all lost. As Johnson points out, Virgil has changed narrators and perspectives. Virgil’s language suddenly shifts as well and the description of Iris is full of light and beautiful imagery. It is a stark contrast between Dido’s violent disturbing death and Iris flying in on saffron wings bringing beautiful colors across the sun. Iris’ lightness shrouds Dido’s death in literal darkness as the reader forgets about the trauma. Dido, as Johnson points out, has lost all of her agency.¹¹⁵

Johnson argues that this beautiful description of Dido not only belittles her, but also paints a sinister picture. The lightness provided by Iris illuminates the darkness of Dido’s death. The reader no longer remembers Dido’s nobility and courage as the sudden image of beauty “dissolves the dignity of Dido”.¹¹⁶ Johnson contends that Virgil quickly and purposefully shields

¹¹⁴ Johnson, 68.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 68.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 71.

the reader from seeing the troubling death, which then in turn shields the reader from considering what that death really means to the epic as a whole. This prevents us from seeing the human cost of war. The reader does not view Dido as a victim any longer. In fact, her presence is just simply forgotten and the story continues without so much as a second thought. However, Dido is a victim and her death represents a significant loss caused by Aeneas' actions. Johnson contends that in this scene, like many throughout the poem, there is a "conflict between the piety that is defined by patriotism and the larger piety that encompasses not only responsibility for persons of one's own family and *civitas* but also for persons whose humanity and suffering demand one's respect and help".¹¹⁷ In Book Four, Aeneas is forced to ignore his own instincts and personal beliefs in order to follow his destiny to found Rome. He has to ignore his personal piety, and Dido suffers immensely because of it. With this analysis of Dido's death in mind, Johnson, like Parry, perceives the darkness of the *Aeneid* and uncovers Virgil's emphasis of the darkness.

III b. Book Six

Book Six is often used by those who read the *Aeneid* optimistically due to the Roman Mission and the inclusion of a long list of Rome's achievements. However, Wendell Clausen in his 1964 article "An Interpretation of the *Aeneid*" sees something different. Clausen asserts that Anchises' list of Rome's achievements is not simply propaganda, nor is it a rumination on the costs of war, but is actually a combination of the two.¹¹⁸ This two-sided view of the *Aeneid* falls into line with Parry's belief that the *Aeneid* has a public voice of triumph and a private voice of regret, which will be discussed later in this section. This list of achievements illustrates Roman history as a long Pyrrhic victory. There can be no success without loss, and oftentimes that loss is just as great as the victory. Clausen finds the *Aeneid* a paradox as it celebrates the

¹¹⁷ Johnson, 73.

¹¹⁸ Clausen, 86.

achievements of a hero and his victory, but shows too the immense losses the hero suffers as well as the losses of the war itself.¹¹⁹ Aeneas finally wins at the end of the poem, but at what cost?

Throughout the entire poem, Aeneas “suffers from melancholia” and is “moody, hesitant, reflective”.¹²⁰ At the beginning of the poem in Book One, Aeneas even states that he wishes he were dead (*mene Iliacis occumbere campis non potuisse* (A. 1.97-98)). As Clausen contends, there is never a sense of victory in this poem, writing that “the *Aeneid* moves us because it enlists our sympathy on the side of loneliness, suffering, and defeat”.¹²¹ Thus, in Book Six, Anchises’ list of achievements ends on a sad note. He mentions Marcellus, who was Augustus’ nephew. Marcellus should have been Augustus’ successor, but he instead died of an illness. Anchises at first speaks highly of Marcellus, but then when Aeneas asks for more he says “O son, do not seek the great sorrow of your (people); the fates will show him only so much on the earth nor will they permit him to exist beyond that” *o gnate, ingentem luctum ne quaere tuorum; ostendent terris hunc tantum fata nec ultra esse sinent* (A. 6.868-870). Anchises continues on describing Marcellus’ death and funeral procession, which Clausen argues is an odd way to end the list of Roman achievements, which lasts for over 120 lines. The book does not end with propaganda illustrating a bright future for Rome or even praise of Augustus. It ends with death.

Clausen also argues that the final eleven lines of the book continue this trend of not praising Rome. In these last lines, Aeneas exits the underworld and similar to Odysseus has to go through either the Gates of Horn or the Gates of Ivory.

Sunt geminae Somni portae, quarum altera fertur
cornea, qua veris facilis datur exitus umbris,
altera candenti perfecta nitens elephanto,
sed falsa ad caelum mittunt insomnia Manes.

¹¹⁹ Clausen, 82.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 77, 80.

¹²¹ Ibid., 81.

his ibi tum natum Anchises unaque Sibyllam
prosequitur dictis portaque emittit eburna, (*A.* 6.893-898)

There are twin gates of Sleep, of which one is said to be horn,
By which easy exit is given to true shades,
The other made shining with white ivory,
But the shades send false dreams to the sky above.
With these words (said) there then Anchises follows his son
Together with the Sybil and sends them out through the ivory gate.

Clausen finds the fact that Aeneas went through the Ivory Gate interesting and ends his article with this scene. Only false dreams go through the Ivory Gate, and thus Clausen argues Aeneas' dreams must be false.¹²² Some could argue that Aeneas went through the Ivory Gate because he was not a true shade or that it was before midnight and dreams dreamed before midnight were always false.¹²³ Clausen, however, argues that Virgil imbued more meaning into this scene than just simple time telling. Unhelpfully, Clausen does not make a clear statement about what he thinks Virgil really meant, only stating that Virgil must have meant something about the dreams themselves, something more ominous. The most compelling argument would be that Virgil did indeed want the reader to know that Aeneas' dreams were false, which would then further subvert the propagandistic language of Anchises' prophecies.

Parry briefly discusses Book Six in his article as well, focusing more on the role of Aeneas as the hero of the epic. As discussed in the section on Book Four, to Parry, Aeneas has little individuality or agency. His destiny precludes that. Thus, Parry states that Aeneas' descent into the underworld is the final loss of his identity. While in the underworld he finally learns more from his father and in turn finally understands his destiny. Ultimately, upon leaving the underworld, he accepts that his destiny is not his. It is for a greater purpose, founding Rome.

¹²² Clausen, 88.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 88.

Parry states that Aeneas' acceptance of his destiny destroys his individuality. It was as if he actually died in the underworld.¹²⁴ Now, he is just an agent for greater powers.

Aeneas' identity has instead become one with his destiny. But as Parry argues, Aeneas will never truly be victorious in his destiny even when he technically achieves it. He will always suffer as "all the wonders of the most powerful institution the world has ever known are not necessarily of greater importance than the emptiness of human suffering".¹²⁵ This is where the public voice of triumph and private voice of regret that Parry finds in the poem surfaces. As Parry writes, "Aeneas cannot resist the forces of history, but he can be capable of human suffering".¹²⁶ Aeneas feels no emotion for fulfilling his destiny, but as the reader can see, he feels tragic emotion for his own losses. Virgil may be lauding the success of Aeneas and Rome, but he is using Aeneas' complexities to highlight the darkness of that success.

Both Clausen's and Parry's analyses of Book Six paint a bleak picture of a book that is usually so discussed and analyzed for its praise of Rome and Augustus. Clausen views the end of Book Six as a negative commentary on Rome's achievements and Augustus, which he argues Virgil did purposefully as a means of subversion. Parry views Book Six as a continuation of Aeneas losing his individuality and his heroism. Both of these arguments stem from pessimistic readings of the text and, most interestingly, show how a usually optimistic passage can be taken to mean something completely different.

III c. Book Twelve

Book Twelve is the book most often used by scholars in promoting a different reading of the poem, especially the ending. The Harvard School of Thought relies heavily on this book. Wendell Clausen briefly mentions this final book in his article, but Michael Putnam and W.R.

¹²⁴ Parry, 121.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 123.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 122.

Johnson use it extensively. This book documents the lead-up to Turnus' death and the uncharacteristic actions and behavior of both Turnus and Aeneas. Clausen, Putnam, and Johnson focus more of their arguments on Aeneas, seeing a distinct monumental shift in Aeneas' character in the last fifty lines. As Clausen states, "the poem ends with a sudden outburst of sorrow and a death" carried out by Aeneas, which leaves the reader stunned by his actions.¹²⁷

First, Clausen briefly looks at the end of Book Twelve, arguing that the final scene of the poem is not a triumph, as some scholars argue. There is certainly no evidence of a personal triumph as Aeneas loses control of himself and his emotions. As Clausen argues, for Aeneas' sake, "all the labor and anguish might have been made to seem more endurable were it consummated or justified in a final triumph".¹²⁸ But, as Clausen points out, everything, all of the losses, not just Turnus' death, made it impossible for it to be a triumph. As mentioned earlier in the section on Book Six, even though Rome was perhaps the greatest empire, the losses that its success caused shrouded its successes in darkness. It is not possible to be truly victorious when so much is lost. Clausen argues that this final scene of violence perfectly illustrates this Pyrrhic victory. The sudden outburst leaves the reader stunned and reminded of immense violence that led to this end and to this fulfillment of destiny.¹²⁹ To Clausen, Virgil purposefully ended the poem this way to show the reader what victory truly costs.

Johnson takes a different tack and first looks at the character of Turnus at the beginning of the book. In the first fifty lines of Book Twelve, the word *violentia* is used twice in reference to Turnus.¹³⁰ Turnus is consumed by his *violentia*, an irrational sickness, as Johnson describes it,

¹²⁷ Clausen, 85.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 84.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 85.

¹³⁰ 12.9 and 12.45.

and by this point in the poem, he is beyond help.¹³¹ Lavinia's blush in lines 64 to 66 (*lacrimis...flagrantis perfusa genas cui plurimus ignem subiecit rubor et calefacta per ora cucurrit* (A. 12.64-66)) makes his sickness burn more within him (*illum turbat amor, figitque in virgine vultus: ardet in arma magis* (A. 12.70-71)). In these first one hundred lines, Virgil repeatedly uses words like *ardet*, *flagrantis*, *rubor*, *ignem* and other fire-related language to illustrate this burning and sickness inside Turnus.¹³²

Because of his sickness that has overwhelmed him, his motives and behavior are unclear and appear irrational. This irrationality provides a different perspective of Turnus, who until this book came across as stoic and heroic. Now he has become weak, as the lion simile in the first ten lines illustrates (*poenorum qualis in arvis saucius ille gravi venantum vulnere pectus tum demum movet arma leo* (A. 12.4-6)). Prior to this, he was often described as the hunter or predator, not the hunted. He loses his heroism by Book Twelve and is now a victim.¹³³ Johnson contends that Turnus is so consumed by his sickness and is even repentant towards Aeneas that his death is uncalled for. Johnson also notes that Lavinia's blush functions similarly to Iris' arrival to Dido's death in Book Four. Lavinia's beauty and lightness highlights the darkness of Turnus' descent into madness as well as his later death.¹³⁴ Johnson succinctly summarizes Virgil's use of light, writing, "the darkness does not serve to foil the light, the light illuminates the quality and the extent of the darkness".¹³⁵

Johnson continues his analysis of Book Twelve with Turnus' death scene. Now, it is not only Turnus that is consumed by *violentia*. It is also Aeneas, consumed by both *violentia* and *ira* over Pallas' death. In these final lines, Aeneas loses control. He changes from being emotionless

¹³¹ Johnson, 52.

¹³² Lines in Book 12 that include this language are: 3, 55, 65, 68, 71, 77, 100.

¹³³ Johnson, 53.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 59.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 75.

and cold to angry and emotional. He loses his control of his *pietas* and his focus on his destiny. In this final scene, as Johnson writes, “the greatness of human spirit *pietas* is ruined by murderous unreason *violentia/ira*”.¹³⁶ With this broken *pietas*, Johnson also argues that Aeneas has realized that he cannot be both patriotic and compassionate. He has to either focus on his destiny and relinquish his individuality for the future Roman State, as has been discussed at length in both sections on Book Four and Six, or focus on his personal loyalties and family. However, by this point in the poem, it is too late for him to make that shift and be that personally driven. Johnson argues that his attempt at compassion for the dead, namely Pallas, is futile and pathetic.¹³⁷

Johnson’s main argument is that by the end of Book Twelve the “poem [has become] a meditation on the human condition and on the ways in which rational liberty is jeopardized by the obscurity of our beginnings and our ends, by the frailty of our freedom and our reason, and by the powers of darkness”.¹³⁸ Being human precludes true victory in war. No one can escape from the destruction and loss of war. Even those who are destined for greatness (i.e. Aeneas and Turnus) ultimately fail at maintaining that façade of aloofness and detachedness.

Johnson notes that a sudden shift happens at the end of the poem that adds to both Turnus’ destruction and to the futility of his death. Turnus finally loses everything that was supporting him. Juno has acquiesced to Jupiter to leave Aeneas alone, but Turnus cannot and will not ever know that. Johnson argues that this secret only adds further to Turnus’ madness and the irrationality of his actions. By this point, both men have become victims of an irrational madness that denies their dignity and bravery. As Johnson writes, “Virgil chooses to emphasize a moment when Aeneas gives way to anger which, however perfectly justified, is directed against a man

¹³⁶ Johnson, 74.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 74.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 91.

who is no longer, in any way, a match for him, and who is, though Aeneas cannot know this, a victim of mindless, evil design”.¹³⁹

By the end of the poem, Virgil has described a “world where prevalence of anger and unreason and sheer ignorance is so great that the human spirit is seen to be awesomely vulnerable and human effort is seen to be matched against dark forces that are as insuperable as they are mysterious”.¹⁴⁰ In a world such as this, it is hard to be good, honest, and courageous. As Johnson argues, the concepts of reason and freedom are simply illusions in this universe.¹⁴¹ Thus, Turnus’ and Aeneas’ descent into madness and anger is not that surprising. According to Johnson, Virgil’s epic poem is about humans at their most desperate. It is not about how humans should be, but about how they truly are. Although they try to be heroic and stoic, they are still human and full of emotion. That humanity cannot be denied and will ultimately reveal itself in the darkest of places.

Turning to Putnam now, a unique argument surfaces: Juno is the ultimate victor of the poem.¹⁴² Optimistic readings argue that Aeneas is indeed the victor. But Putnam argues it is Aeneas who loses at the end. For the first six books, Aeneas was the protector and savior of the Trojan people. He constantly obeyed moderation, mercy, and humility, and did not allow himself to be swayed by emotions. But by the end of Book Twelve, he has changed.¹⁴³ Like both Clausen and Johnson, Putnam also argues that Aeneas is consumed by rage and violence. He becomes like the Greeks he so hated, where violence is utilized to attain an end.¹⁴⁴ He is no longer able to

¹³⁹ Johnson, 133.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 133.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 75.

¹⁴² Michael Putnam, *Poetry of the Aeneid*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965, 201.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 152.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

resist his humanity and his human emotions. Just like Turnus, he does not conquer madness, but succumbs to it.

With Aeneas' sudden change in mental status, Putnam compares two similes of Aeneas as the hunter hunting a stag, one from Book Four and the other from Book Twelve.¹⁴⁵ In Book Four, Dido is compared to a stag hit by a hunter, Aeneas (*qualis coniecta cerva sagitta, quam procul incautam nemora inter Cresia fixit pastor agens telis liquitque volatile ferrum nescius* (*A.* 4.69-72) “as if an incautious deer struck by an arrow, which a shepherd hunting with his bow fixed from afar among the Cretan forests and unknowing left the winged steel”). Both Dido and Aeneas are unaware of the situation. Dido is described as wandering the forest not concerned for her safety (*incautam*), and Aeneas is described as unknowing (*nescius*) when he launches his arrow and it hits her. But in Book Twelve, Aeneas has drastically changed. Turnus is compared to a stag as well, but Aeneas is described as a rabid dog seeking to devour the deer:

inclusum veluti si quando flumine nactus
cervum aut puniceae saeptum formidine pennae
venator cursu canis et latratibus instat;
ille autem insidiis et ripa territus alta
mille fugit refugitque vias, at vividus Umber
haeret hians, iam iamque tenet similisque tenenti
inrepuit malis morsuque elusus inani est; (*A.* 12.749-755)

Just as when a hunting dog found a stag hemmed in by the river
Or hemmed in by fear of red feathers
And it presses with a run and with barking;
Nevertheless terrified by the tricks and the high banks
The deer flees and flees a thousand ways, but the lively Umbrian dog
Gaping clings (to it), and now nearly has him and sounds with his jaws as if
Holding him and is cheated by empty bites.

Both Turnus and Aeneas in this simile have taken on different roles from the earlier simile. Turnus is victimized and threatened. He is terrified, whereas Dido was not. Aeneas is a rabid hunter foaming at the mouth to catch Turnus. The madness of each has made them lose

¹⁴⁵ Putnam, 188-189.

control of their persons. As Putnam argues, Aeneas has finally cracked from all of the suffering he has seen and has finally descended into darkness.¹⁴⁶

Putnam argues that the death of Turnus prohibits the *Aeneid* from being read as a piece of Augustan propaganda. Putnam equates Turnus with Italy and thus, with the death of Turnus, Italy has also died. This is not an ideal vision of the greatness of Augustan Rome. Aeneas cannot be a model for Augustus because he openly denies moderation, mercy, and humility in this final scene. As Putnam writes, “the forces of violence and irrationality which swirl around Aeneas lead ultimately not to his triumph over them but rather complete submission, whose suddenness in the poem’s concluding lines add a note of emphasis so strong as to be undeniable in any realistic accounting of the total epic”.¹⁴⁷ Aeneas has failed to follow the Roman Mission set forth by his father in Book Six. He only subdues the proud; he does not spare the humble. Some can argue that Turnus was repentant before his death, and thus Aeneas should have spared him. If Aeneas hadn’t killed Turnus, it would have proved that triumph of empire was not at the cost of personal rights and liberty.¹⁴⁸

Putnam goes a step further and argues that the death of Pallas was the ultimate catalyst for the downfall of Roman success. The death of Pallas destroyed any hope for a renewal of the golden age.¹⁴⁹ If Aeneas had only maintained control, the creation of Rome and its later achievements might not have been such pyrrhic victories. But Aeneas lost his focus. To Putnam, Aeneas becomes the personification of avenging wrath, which is an interesting reversal of roles. At the start of the poem, Juno is the personification of avenging wrath as she considers her anger towards Aeneas. Aeneas’ limbs in line 92 of Book One are loosened by the cold (the anger of

¹⁴⁶ Putnam, 189.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 192.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 193.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 190.

Juno) (*extemplo Aeneae solvuntur frigore membra* (A. 1.92)). Then in line 952 of Book Twelve, Turnus' limbs are loosened by the cold (i.e. the anger of Aeneas) (*ast illi solvuntur frigore membra* (A. 12.952)). The poem has come full circle. Aeneas has become utterly consumed by his anger and Juno has released herself from her anger. As Putnam argues, Juno is the victor and Aeneas is the loser, which is a very bleak and dark reading of the *Aeneid*, especially given the traditional optimistic view of Aeneas as the hero. By making the goddess Juno the victor, Putnam is further removing any semblance of free will from humans. The gods are the only ones who have any control.

III d. Miscellaneous Books

In this last section, I will briefly discuss two other books that these scholars read as containing darkness, meaning there is a negative undercurrent in these books to the traditional positive plot. According to Parry, Book Seven's list of places mourning the Latin heroes fighting Aeneas represent what Virgil viewed as the real Italy.¹⁵⁰ They are personified as mourning the heroes, which Parry argues shows that the places are the true victims of Aeneas' war, not the people. The real Italy has been lost through this conquering savage war. As Parry writes, "the explicit message of the *Aeneid* claims that Rome was a happy reconciliation of the natural virtues of the local Italian peoples and the civilized might of the Trojans".¹⁵¹ But, to Parry, the last half of the poem illustrates that the formation of Rome's empire involved the loss of the pristine purity of Italy. Parry also views Turnus as the embodiment of Italy. He has simple valor within him and a love of honor, which cannot survive the forces of civilization.¹⁵² Parry argues that in Book Seven there is a "nostalgia for the heroic and Latin past" as well as a "pervasive sadness",

¹⁵⁰ Parry, 109.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 110.

¹⁵² Ibid.

which is not just limited to Book Seven.¹⁵³ This nostalgia and sadness Parry views as the private voice of regret present in the poem. There is no sense of triumph in this book, or the poem as a whole, only a sense of loss.

Finally, Johnson sees Book Nine as an interesting response to death. The deaths of Nisus and Euryalus are viewed by Johnson through the lens of “dissolving pathos”.¹⁵⁴ The reader feels sorry for the two when they die, as their deaths are so violently beautiful. The beauty in their deaths, especially Euryalus’ given the flower imagery, creates a sense of vulnerability and defenselessness for the two.¹⁵⁵ Their deaths are not depicted as brash and manly, like typical soldier deaths. Given that their unnecessary actions led to their deaths, there is also a sense of pity for the two. Johnson argues that the reader then views the deaths as “intolerable” and unnecessary. Virgil’s language presents these deaths in such a way that the reader cannot understand the true purpose of these deaths. To Johnson, they cannot be said to be “actualities”, or rather inherent realities, like other deaths in the *Aeneid*.¹⁵⁶ Johnson argues that Virgil illustrates their deaths with this beautiful melancholic language so that the reader is shielded from seeing the deaths as they really are. The reader then cannot see the necessity for their deaths, and thus cannot understand the necessities that govern human existence, i.e. death.¹⁵⁷ Johnson argues that Virgil’s language causes fear for the reader, being face to face with death and destruction. There is no glory in this scene, only darkness and sorrow.

IV. Conclusion

When looking at the many scenes from the *Aeneid* that Parry, Clausen, Putnam, and Johnson included in their interpretations of the text, there are several common threads, namely

¹⁵³ Parry, 111.

¹⁵⁴ Johnson, 62.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 62.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 63.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 62.

the futility of human existence and the utter devastation of war. To them, it is impossible to be victorious in a universe where death and destruction are rampant and inescapable. Nor is it possible to be victorious in a world where human emotions and personal loyalties exist. As they all argued, the *Aeneid* cannot simply be an optimistic piece of propaganda supporting Augustus and the Roman Empire. There is obvious darkness in the lines of the poem. As both Johnson and Putnam contend, only those who read the *Aeneid* superficially will ever see the positives.

The common threads among these four scholars' works make a clear statement about the rise of the pessimistic reading. These four scholars all commented extensively on the futility of human existence and the devastating effects of war. Having written their articles and books following the end of World War Two, it makes perfect sense why they saw darkness in the lines of the *Aeneid*. Not only was Europe destroyed, but countless American lives were lost as well. Then, to watch a new war between superpowers begin to start, fears of more loss had to be high. America could never return to the "good old days" prior to World War One and Two. Intellectuals viewed America as corrupt and tainted. The push for more war after so much loss could not be fully supported.

However, some scholars, like Brooks Otis, have questioned the rise of the pessimistic reading, stating that it is an "anachronistic product of New Left politics in the sixties and seventies".¹⁵⁸ Farrell argues the opposite, stating it is not anachronistic to consider the politics and that they should instead be considered "as a necessary and inevitable part of how antiquity had to be constructed in the postwar World War II decades".¹⁵⁹ Thus, given the tumultuous political climate following the war, it is no surprise that Parry's assertion that there are two

¹⁵⁸ Farrell, 16.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

voices of the *Aeneid*, a public voice of triumph and a private voice of regret, became the rallying cry of The Harvard School of Thought.

Most interestingly though, in 2017, two Harvard School alumni published two short articles regarding The Harvard School of Thought. In his article “The ‘Harvard School’: A Historical Note by an Alumnus”, James Zetzel writes about what he thinks is the true Harvard School of Thought. He argues that it is “an emphasis on internal reading, exploring the words of the text, and giving the inconsistencies and hesitations full value”.¹⁶⁰ This description falls under the label of New Criticism. This method of literary criticism, he contends, was a form of resistance to the biographical and historical criticism of texts used by scholars past. He believes that the pessimism found in the Harvard School of Thought is not new, rather that no one had uncovered it before through the biographical and historical methods.

The second article, “A Voyage Around the Harvard School” by S. J. Harrison, argues against his earlier introduction from his 1990 book *Oxford Readings in Vergil’s Aeneid*, which I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. To briefly summarize my earlier discussion, Harrison believed that The Harvard School of Thought stemmed from political leanings. In his 2017 article though, Harrison states that Clausen and Putnam’s works were entirely unconnected to politics.¹⁶¹ He concedes that Parry’s article may have been connected to politics given his protest of the Vietnam War, but does state that it “seems unlikely that Parry allowed his views on war to color his scholarship”.¹⁶² In fact, Harrison states that the Harvard School may even come from 19th century British scholars, who first viewed Virgil as “melancholic”, a term Clausen often used. Given this new information from Zetzel and Harrison, it is now even harder to say what

¹⁶⁰ James Zetzel, “The ‘Harvard School’: A Historical Note by an Alumnus.” *Classical World*. 111.1 (2017): 126.

¹⁶¹ S. J. Harrison, “A Voyage Around the Harvard School.” *Classical World*. 111.1 (2017): 78.

¹⁶² *Ibid*.

truly caused the rise of The Harvard School of Thought and the pessimistic reading. But, the use of New Criticism seems to be the most compelling answer given the recent scholarship.

After analyzing both Mussolini's and The Harvard School's readings of Virgil's works and comparing the two, it seems that politics cannot help but be a part of the latter's. New Criticism definitely helped develop The Harvard School's pessimistic readings, but post World War II and Cold War fears had to have influenced these scholars. Mussolini's appropriation of Virgil's works could also be easily argued as a possible influence on The Harvard School. His traditional and optimistic reading was swiftly dismissed as superficial by the close readings of The Harvard School.

Another superficial reading of Virgil's works is taking place currently in 2018. The Alt-Right movement has taken Virgil and his *Aeneid*, along with multiple other Greco-Roman authors, as their own. They have appropriated Virgil, just like Mussolini did, to lend authority to their movement. Members have stated that there are pro-White and anti-immigration values in the *Aeneid*, which are in fact not there. But given this penchant by political movements to not read ancient texts closely, the most hateful and superfluous interpretations can take hold as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: The Alt-Right and Virgil

Turning now to the 21st century, an interesting phenomenon is occurring with Virgil and Classics in general. The Alt-Right movement, which has come to the forefront of American (and European) politics in the last several years, has started using many classical references in their rhetoric. Before beginning this chapter in earnest though, two issues must be acknowledged. First, my goal with this chapter is simply to chronicle and interpret this phenomenon with an unbiased voice. I personally do not agree with the Alt-Right movement, but being a classicist and a Virgilian scholar, I believe this phenomenon must be exposed and discussed. Second, there is no scholarship about this phenomenon at the time that I am writing this. Thus, there is no historical hindsight or perspective that can be offered, though the Classicist-run online magazine *Eidolon* and blog *Pharos* are beginning to delve into these appropriations. There is not much historical precedent that I can compare this phenomenon to, except for the charges of Fascism and Nazism made new again, which recall the political movements of the 1920s and 1930s discussed in my first chapter. Therefore, the majority of this chapter will be my own thoughts with only primary sources as support.

I. Situating the Alt-Right

It is hard to find a concrete definition for the term “Alt-Right” as it is such a nebulous movement, but there seems to be some agreement that it is an amalgamation of far-right groups that propagate anti-Semitism, anti-immigration, anti-feminism, anti-homosexuality, and most critically, white nationalism and American exceptionalism.¹⁶³ American exceptionalism is the belief that America “follows a path of history different from the laws or norms that govern other countries...the U.S. is not just a bigger and more powerful country — but an exception. It is the

¹⁶³ Liam Stack. “Alt-Right, Alt-Left, Antifa: A Glossary of Extremist Language.” *The New York Times*, 15 Aug. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/us/politics/alt-left-Alt-Right-glossary.html.

bearer of freedom and liberty, and morally superior to ‘Europe’”.¹⁶⁴ Several of the distinct groups that make up the movement include neo-Nazis, neo-Fascists, and even neo-Pagans. One of the leaders of the movement, Richard Spencer, described the movement as “identity politics for white people”.¹⁶⁵

The Southern Poverty Law Center has a more succinct definition stating that “the Alternative Right, commonly known as the ‘Alt-Right,’ is a set of far-right ideologies, groups and individuals whose core belief is that ‘white identity’ is under attack by multicultural forces using ‘political correctness’ and ‘social justice’ to undermine white people and ‘their’ civilization.”¹⁶⁶ It must be acknowledged that the Alt-Right movement is not a part of the Republican political party. The Alt-Right does not believe in the Republican Party’s traditional conservative platform and often refers to the Republican Party as “The Establishment”.¹⁶⁷ The Alt-Right views “The Establishment” as supporting the multiculturalist policies of the past several decades, such as Affirmative Action and other anti-discrimination laws. They view Republicans as weak and inept politicians who are not doing enough for white people. However, with the rise of Donald Trump with his slogan “Make America Great Again”, the Alt-Right found a potential figurehead. As Spencer said, “Donald Trump is the first step towards identity politics for European-Americans in the United States”.¹⁶⁸

It is also difficult to find out why the Alt-Right came into being. The New York Times journalist Christopher Caldwell pinpoints the Alt-Right’s birth to potentially around the end of

¹⁶⁴ Ian Tyrrell. “What, exactly, is ‘American Exceptionalism?’” *The Week*, 21 Oct. 2016, theweek.com/articles/654508/what-exactly-american-exceptionalism.

¹⁶⁵ Stack, www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/us/politics/alt-left-Alt-Right-glossary.html.

¹⁶⁶ “Alt-Right.” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/Alt-Right.

¹⁶⁷ Christopher Caldwell. “What the Alt-Right Really Means.” *The New York Times*, 2 Dec. 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/12/02/opinion/sunday/what-the-Alt-Right-really-means.html.

¹⁶⁸ Stack, www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/us/politics/alt-left-Alt-Right-glossary.html.

the Cold War in the late 1980s and early 1990s.¹⁶⁹ He argues that the Alt-Right appeared due to the shifting political, cultural, and racial tides in America at this time. The distinct shift towards multiculturalism in those decades gave rise to the question of what America truly is as a nation. Caldwell argues strongly that the Alt-Right movement started gaining momentum quickly with the election of Barack Obama in 2008. Since the election of our first black president, the movement has skyrocketed to national media attention. Donald Trump's emergence and election as president only fueled the fire.

The Alt-Right movement seems to expend much of its efforts on the internet through the use of memes, blogs, and other social media platforms such as Reddit and Twitter. There are also several online and print media publications, specifically *The American Conservative* and Breitbart News, that contribute to the Alt-Right movement. Stephen Bannon, former chairman of Breitbart News, once said that Breitbart was a “platform for the Alt-Right”.¹⁷⁰

II. The Alt-Right and Why It Likes the Classics

The vast majority of content on Alt-Right websites focuses on the maleness and the whiteness of Greco-Roman culture. As mentioned earlier, maleness and whiteness are key tenets of the Alt-Right movement. The blog Pharos, which documents and discusses the use of Greco-Roman culture by the Alt-Right, has found numerous references by the Alt-Right to not only cultural and historical events and figures, but to actual Greek and Roman authors.¹⁷¹ A good number of these references are to Aristotle, Plato, and Thucydides. The Alt-Right seems to use these references very loosely, not considering their actual contexts. As Donna Zuckerberg wrote in her *Eidolon* article “How to be a good Classicist under a bad emperor”, the Alt-Right “appears to have little interest in understanding the ancient world in any way other than the most

¹⁶⁹ Caldwell, www.nytimes.com/2016/12/02/opinion/sunday/what-the-Alt-Right-really-means.html.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Curtis Dozier. *Pharos: Doing Justice to the Classics*. Vassar College, 2017-2018, pages.vassar.edu/pharos/.

superficial one”.¹⁷² The Alt-Right also blithely uses classical idiomatic phrases like “crossing the Rubicon” and “ascending Olympus” in their rhetoric.¹⁷³ Spencer has even co-opted the Roman salute, which was first co-opted by Hitler and the Nazis and made popular in several films of the classical epic genre in the 1930s through the 1960s.

A Breitbart News article entitled “An Establishment Conservative’s Guide to the Alt-Right” summarizes well the reason for the Alt-Right’s use of Classics: “Attempts to scrub western history of its great figures are particularly galling to the Alt-Right, who in addition to the preservation of western culture, care deeply about heroes and heroic virtues. This follows decades in which left-wingers on campus sought to remove the study of ‘dead white males’ from the focus of western history and literature curricula...such cultural vandalism may just be their highest priority”.¹⁷⁴ This response to “cultural vandalism” is also the main rallying cry for another Alt-Right group named Identity Evropa. They support “white racial consciousness” and aim to strengthen their European roots, while also advocating for American exceptionalism.¹⁷⁵ The vast majority of famous Western historical figures are indeed white and male, and so the Alt-Right’s focus on this is not surprising. But it should be noted, something quite obvious, that most of Western history was written by white males in the first place.

A key issue with the Alt-Right’s use of Classics is the question to whom does Classics belong? Whose patrimony is it? Because the Alt-Right focuses only on the qualities of whiteness, Westernness, and maleness in Classics and they themselves are white Western males, they feel they have a strong hold, if not a right, over using the Classics for their movement. But

¹⁷² Donna Zuckerberg. “How to Be a Good Classicist Under a Bad Emperor.” *Eidolon*, 21 Nov. 2016, eidolon.pub/how-to-be-a-good-classicist-under-a-bad-emperor-6b848df6e54a.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Allum Bokhari and Milo Yiannopoulos. “An Establishment Conservative’s Guide to the Alt-Right.” *Breitbart*, 29 Mar. 2016, www.breitbart.com/tech/2016/03/29/an-establishment-conservatives-guide-to-the-Alt-Right/.

¹⁷⁵ “Identity Evropa.” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/identity-evropa. “About Us.” *Identity Evropa*, www.identityevropa.com/about-us.

as will be reiterated throughout this chapter, they only see the first layer of Greco-Roman culture, that of so-called white and male superiority. To them, Western civilization must be preserved and they are the ones to preserve it.

III. The Application of Classics by the Alt-Right through Virgil

The Alt-Right movement seems to focus on three tenets of their beliefs in regards to Greco-Roman culture: Aryanism (white supremacy), anti-immigration and racism, and American/Western exceptionalism. They also seem to have three strategies of incorporating Greco-Roman culture in their rhetoric online: pseudonyms, direct quotes of ancient sources in articles and blog posts, and discussions on social media platforms about Greco-Roman culture in reference to the Alt-Right but without direct context or quotes. I have observed these three strategies with Virgil and his *Aeneid* specifically. With the remainder of this chapter, I will detail these instances according to each strategy.

III a. Pseudonyms

The use of pseudonyms is common online especially on social media platforms such as Twitter and Reddit. On news platforms though, it is less common. Thus, the fact that one of Breitbart News' writers writes under the pseudonym "Virgil" is striking. This writer has written dozens of articles for Breitbart since 2012, many if not all regarding Alt-Right ideas. The identity of this "Virgil" is unknown and has spurred many conversations on social media about his identity with some even arguing "Virgil" is Steve Bannon or the former US Senator Virgil Goode. "Virgil" has also written several pieces that specifically mention Greco-Roman antiquity. In one piece entitled "America has been warned: Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*", he agrees with Gibbon's argument that the Roman Empire fell because of immigration. In the article, "Virgil" writes that Gibbon argued that Rome became a welfare

society to help support the influx of immigrants, but that when the Goths came in 410 AD, the immigrants, instead of supporting Rome, turned against Rome to help the Goths.¹⁷⁶ Because of this, “Virgil” states that Rome fell because of “betrayal within” and then uses Gibbon’s argument and book as support for anti-immigration rhetoric. As mentioned earlier, the Alt-Right strongly promotes anti-immigration. “Virgil” ends his article by writing “We’ve been warned”.¹⁷⁷

Another interesting aspect of “Virgil” is his use of the real Virgil’s own image. On most of his articles, he has superimposed a drawing of Virgil in profile over other images relating to each article as seen in Figure E at the end of this chapter. This use of Virgil’s own image lends even more authority to the fake Virgil’s writings, as if he is trying to equate himself with the real Virgil. His article titles also all start with “Virgil:”, which even further adds classical authority to his writings. Given that there is no knowledge of who the author is behind this pseudonymous Virgil, other news articles and social media posts always refer to Virgil as the author, which continues to add to his authority. “Virgil” has managed to create this image that he has the authority of Virgil behind him. He has elided his identity with one of the founders of Western tradition. As Donna Zuckerberg wrote, the Alt-Right is “self-mythologizing”.¹⁷⁸ They are building and maintaining an image of authority that spans millennia and empire. Interestingly, this self-mythologizing by the Alt-Right recalls what Augustus did during his reign, as he commissioned the *Aeneid* specifically to canonize a certain foundation myth of Rome for the explicit purpose of building and maintaining authority for years to come.

In addition to the pseudonymous Virgil, there are several other interesting pseudonyms referring to Virgil and his works. On Twitter there are multiple handles that include the word

¹⁷⁶ Virgil. “America has been warned: Edward Gibbon’s *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.” *Breitbart*, 22 Nov. 2014, www.breitbart.com/big-government/2014/11/22/america-has-been-warned-virgil/.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Zuckerberg, eidolon.pub/how-to-be-a-good-classicist-under-a-bad-emperor-6b848df6e54a.

“Aeneas” and variations on the *Aeneid*. Most are innocuous parody accounts that detail the plot of the *Aeneid* as if told by tweets, but there are three that are markedly different, especially in what they tweet. The first twitter handle, @AeneasAgrippa, is an interesting combination of people. Aeneas is a mythological figure, but Agrippa could be referring to two men, either to Marcus Agrippa who was the right-hand man of Augustus or to Agrippa, mythological King of Alba Longa and descendant of Aeneas. Virgil praises Marcus Agrippa in the *Aeneid* Book 8 for his actions at the Battle of Actium.¹⁷⁹ Both of these Agrippas had power and success, either mythological or actual, so the twitter handle connotes authority and brings to mind the “self-mythologizing” of which the Alt-Right partakes. @AeneasAgrippa tweets mostly about Alt-Right ideas and against the Democratic Party, often called the Left. In one tweet, he writes that the Democratic “worldview necessitates the destruction of Americas heritage, in order to remake society into a post Anglo socialist union”.¹⁸⁰ He also tweets against the media, writing that the media “deceptively edits” out conservatives and their beliefs, which is a very common belief among Alt-Right members online.

The other two twitter accounts referencing Virgil and the *Aeneid* are parody accounts, but they both tweet about immigration. The first account is under the twitter handle @TrumpiusAeneas. Their bio is “Sum pius Aeneas. Noble Prince of Troy, lover of Dido, husband to Lavinia, founder of Rome. Let's #MakeTroyGreatAgain”.¹⁸¹ Most of their tweets are in the style of Trump’s tweets and rhetoric as if they were actually Trump himself, but their content is about the plot of the *Aeneid*. The tweets focus on Aeneas’ time in Latium and the

¹⁷⁹ *parte alia ventis et dis Agrippa secundis arduus agmen agens, cui, belli insigne superbum, tempora navali fulgent rostrata corona* (*A.* 8.682-684)

¹⁸⁰ @AeneasAgrippa. “The radicalized political left think even anodyne references to "Anglo-Americanism" should be cause for some sort of punishment. Why is this? Perhaps their worldview necessitates the destruction of Americas heritage, in order to remake society into a post Anglo socialist union.” *Twitter*, 13 Feb. 2018, 8:51 p.m., twitter.com/AeneasAgrippa/status/963636819161223168.

¹⁸¹ @TrumpiusAeneas. *Twitter*. <https://twitter.com/TrumpiusAeneas?lang=en>.

conflict that ensues. In one tweet, they write “More LIES! My weekend with Evander at Rom-a-Tibo is all about trade, borders, immigration and empire. FACT!”¹⁸² In another, they write “Gotta secure our borders if we want to #MakeTroyGreatAgain”.¹⁸³ They even reference Trump’s own travel ban in one tweet, “Loser Odysseus claiming my travel ban an infringement of his human rights. Sad and wrong. He should be home by now anyway. FACT!”¹⁸⁴ Their tweets show an interesting application of the *Aeneid*, specifically for anti-immigration rhetoric. Parodic or not, these tweets further suggest an enduring connection between Trump and ancient Roman ideals about imperialism, and also further strengthen the identification between the Alt-Right and ancient texts.

The other parody twitter account is under the handle @NothinBut_Furor. The user’s name is Turnus and their bio is “Anti-Immigration. All those Trojans landing on our shores is changing everything, including stealing my lovely life to be Lavinia. Rise up and conquer Aeneas!” There are only two tweets from this account that are both parodies of the *Aeneid*, but the bio shows again the same application of the *Aeneid* as @TrumpiusAeneas showed, anti-immigration. These two twitter accounts are seeing anti-immigration tendencies in the *Aeneid*, and although these two accounts are parodies, what they are discussing speaks to Alt-Right ideals. It illustrates how superficial the readings of the *Aeneid* and other Greco-Roman literature are by the Alt-Right, and how these superficial readings allow them to claim authority and patrimony over the Classics.

¹⁸² @TrumpiusAeneas. “More LIES! My weekend with Evander at Rom-a-Tibo is all about trade, borders, immigration and empire. FACT!” *Twitter*. 18 Mar. 2017, 1:17 a.m., twitter.com/TrumpiusAeneas/status/843013548922028032.

¹⁸³ @TrumpiusAeneas. “Gotta secure our borders if we want to #MakeTroyGreatAgain” *Twitter*. 17 Mar. 2017, 12:10 a.m., twitter.com/TrumpiusAeneas/status/842634168609726464.

¹⁸⁴ @TrumpiusAeneas. “Loser Odysseus claiming my travel ban an infringement of his human rights. Sad and wrong. He should be home by now anyway. FACT!” *Twitter*. 16 Mar. 2017, 5:51 a.m., twitter.com/TrumpiusAeneas/status/842357549936574464.

A final example of the use of pseudonyms occurs outside of social media and the internet. One of the leaders of the Alt-Right movement and leader of the Charlottesville, Virginia Unite the Right rally in 2017 has changed his name to Augustus Sol Invictus.¹⁸⁵ His real name is Austin Gillespie. Although Augustus Sol Invictus is not a direct reference to Virgil and his works, it still should be noted due to the link between Augustus and Virgil. Again, this pseudonym demonstrates the “self-mythologizing” in which the Alt-Right partakes. Because the Alt-Right is such a tenuous movement, the use of Greco-Roman names and culture lends a significant amount of authority and credence to their ideas and ideals. The Alt-Right is seeing their beliefs substantiated in Greco-Roman culture, albeit at only a surface-level of understanding of the culture, and they have taken that as support. They are simply the continuation of Greco-Roman culture and, as mentioned earlier, self-styled defenders of it.

III b. Direct *Aeneid* Quotes

One of the most prominent uses of the *Aeneid* by the Alt-Right is from Book 6 lines 86 to 87 when the Sybil is beginning her prophecy. In response to Aeneas’ request to settle in Latium, she tells Aeneas that she first foresees “wars, horrible wars, and the Tiber foaming with much blood” (*bella, horrida bella, et Thybrim multo spumantem sanguine cerno* (*A.* 6.86-87)). The first use of this prophecy occurred in 1968 in the United Kingdom. British Conservative Party Member of Parliament Enoch Powell, a noted classicist himself, delivered a speech at the Westmidlands Area Conservative Political Centre in Birmingham, United Kingdom.¹⁸⁶ It was a response to the Race Relation Bill in parliament that would prohibit discrimination based on race, especially towards immigrants. In his speech, Powell lambasted immigration and the large

¹⁸⁵ “Augustus Sol Invictus.” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/augustus-sol-invictus.

¹⁸⁶ “Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ Speech.” *The Telegraph*, 6 Nov. 2007, www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html.

influx of immigrants arriving in the UK. He argued that the Race Relations Bill would allow immigrants to take over and control the UK, quoting a constituent of his as saying to him that “in this country in 15 or 20 years’ time, the black man will have the whip hand over the white man”.¹⁸⁷ Powell even said that watching the mass of immigration “is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre”.¹⁸⁸

Powell ends his speech with his own prophecy which he concludes with an allusion to the Sybil’s prophecy, “here is the means of showing that the immigrant communities can organise to consolidate their members, to agitate and campaign against their fellow citizens, and to overawe and dominate the rest with the legal weapons which the ignorant and the ill-informed have provided. As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see the River Tiber foaming with much blood.”¹⁸⁹ By the end of his speech, he equates the influx of immigrants with the destruction of British society, even stating that immigration will cause bloodshed and death. His speech quickly became known as the “Rivers of Blood” speech. Powell was criticized for his speech by members of his Conservative Party and was removed from his Shadow Cabinet position. However, he was also widely supported. Many people, even MPs, shared his view on immigration. Because of this he became one of the most divisive politicians in Britain at the time.

His speech has reappeared in the last few years through the Alt-Right both in America and in the UK. Most interestingly, the BBC recently made a decision to broadcast in full Powell’s speech on April 14th 2018 on BBC Radio Four to mark the speech’s fifty-year anniversary. The BBC billed it as a discussion and analysis of the speech. However, the BBC’s

¹⁸⁷ Rachel Summers. “Enoch Powell’s Infamous Speech.” *The Revolutionary Conservative*, 27 Apr. 2017, therevolutionaryconservative.com/articles/04272017enoch-powells-infamous-speech/#.Wt9H6cgh125.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

decision to broadcast the speech was met with swift backlash. The broadcast was still aired though. Some argued that the BBC was “normalizing racism” by broadcasting it.¹⁹⁰ The Alt-Right movement, however, supported the BBC’s decision. Raheem Kassam, an editor for Breitbart News and a supporter of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), said the speech “had come to fruition in many ways”.¹⁹¹

On the news magazine website *The American Conservative*, which was mentioned earlier as an example of the Alt-Right media, an article entitled “The Enoch Powell Question” was published online on March 8th 2018 and printed in the March/April issue. In this article, the author Scott McConnell discusses whether the “Rivers of Blood” speech “got it right”, arguing that perhaps “it is too soon to dismiss Powell’s warning out of hand”.¹⁹² His argument surrounds the idea that Americans are split into two highly divisive and polarized political groups, which is causing internal discord. He also argues that “demographic diversity [in America] is advancing rapidly, a circumstance that social scientists correlate empirically with, at best, a loss of social cohesion and often with civil strife.”¹⁹³ These two elements, he contends, may lead America into a time of major conflict, just as Enoch Powell predicted.

Powell’s use of the allusion to the Sybil’s prophecy to warn against immigration shows again the same selective interpretation of the *Aeneid* as mentioned previously with twitter users. Superficial readings of the epic are providing fodder for anti-immigration rhetoric. But as critics of the Alt-Right and Enoch Powell have noted, the *Aeneid* is not full of anti-immigration ideas. The *Aeneid* actually supports immigration and refugees. The entire story surrounds the journey

¹⁹⁰ Nick Miller. “BBC ‘normalising racism’ by broadcasting Rivers of Blood speech.” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 Apr. 2018, www.smh.com.au/world/europe/bbc-normalising-racism-by-broadcasting-rivers-of-blood-speech-20180413-p4z9cn.html.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Scott McConnell. “The Enoch Powell Question.” *The American Conservative*, 8 Mar. 2018, www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-enoch-powell-question/.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

of Trojan refugees and their success at immigrating in Latium. It also supports intermarriage between ethnicities, as shown through Aeneas and Lavinia's union. It is that integration of differing ethnicities that allowed Rome to be founded. Latinus was even told by the oracle in Book 7 that foreigners (the Trojans) would come to be their kin, who will bear their name to the stars by their blood (*externi venient generi, qui sanguine nostrum nomen in astra ferant* (A. 7.98-99)). Thus, Powell's application of the Sybil's prophecy to support his anti-immigration views is profoundly wrong. It shows again how surface-level and intentionally selective readings of the *Aeneid* permit the most controversial beliefs to flourish.

Granted, two issues must be acknowledged. First, the *bella horrida* that the Sybil prophesied did occur and second, the Latins do turn their backs on the Trojans. However, both of these events stem from the intervention of Juno and the madness from the Furies. After Allecto has caused Lavinia's mother Amata to go mad, Amata laments her daughter's marriage to Aeneas, calling him treacherous and untrustworthy (*perfidus* (A. 7.362)). She also argues that he is going to abduct Lavinia and take her away, which makes her sound even more xenophobic.¹⁹⁴ Amata continues on her rant against Aeneas and accuses her husband Latinus of forsaking his own blood kin since Turnus was betrothed to Lavinia before Aeneas' arrival.¹⁹⁵ When considering that it is divine madness that causes Amata and then Turnus and the rest of the Latins to hate Aeneas and the Trojans for being foreign, it says something striking about anti-immigration and racist views. These views are not portrayed as logical or rational by Virgil, which makes it even more interesting that Enoch Powell and the Alt-Right view the *Aeneid* as having such strong anti-immigration connotations. Their very views are depicted as literally mad

¹⁹⁴ *quam primo Aquilone relinquet perfidus alta petens abducta virgine praedo?* (A. 7.361-362)

¹⁹⁵ *quid cura antiqua tuorum et consanguineo totiens data dextera Turno?* (A. 7.365-366)

in the text. And even further discrediting Powell's use of *bella horrida* is the fact that there were no horrible wars or bloodshed in Britain because of immigration.

III c. Discussions about the Alt-Right movement without direct *Aeneid* quotes

In this last section, I will discuss a unique use of the *Aeneid* and Aeneas by the Alt-Right. Several blog posts mention Aeneas by name, but have no direct quotes. Thus, the use of the *Aeneid* is wholly out of context. Two of the three primary sources are from two blogs focusing on Aryanism and white supremacy. The third is from an Alt-Right offshoot website called Return of Kings, which will be discussed at the end of this chapter. The first two blogs appear to be by private individuals with no connections to politics or the media. The first blog is entitled White Racial Identity and has the byline "truthful information on Christian Identity, National Socialism and the Jewish Problem".¹⁹⁶ The blogger, Brett Light, has several posts about Aryanism, which appear to be pulled from two blogs by blogger Sven Longshanks, one named Aryan Israel and the other, which is now defunct, Fascovereign. In three of Light's blog posts, Aeneas is referred to directly as an ancestor of King Brutus: "Britain gets its name from King Brutus, the grandson of King Aeneas, who was the founder of the Roman Empire".¹⁹⁷ In a post entitled "The Germanic Tribes of Israel", the blogger Sven Longshanks connects King Brutus with King Cecrops, whom he argues was the head of all the "kingly lines in Europe".¹⁹⁸ Cecrops' brother Darda founded Troy and was an ancestor of Aeneas. Aeneas then started the Roman Empire and his descendant King Brutus founded Britain. Longshanks continues his argument by saying that the Trojans as well as many other groups like the Spartans, Minoans, and the Dorians all descended from "the common root of Shem, son of Noah, though the tribe whom God made

¹⁹⁶ Brett Light. *White Racial Identity*, <https://whiteracialidentity.net/>.

¹⁹⁷ Sven Longshanks. "The Germanic Tribes of Israel." *White Racial Identity*, Brett Light, whiteracialidentity.net/white-i-d-essentials/the-germanic-tribes-of-israel/.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

his covenant with, the House of Isaac”.¹⁹⁹ This root led to “today’s nation of Europe”.²⁰⁰

Longshanks’ final argument appears to be that Britain can trace its heritage back to Israel through Aeneas and Cecrops. He ends by stating that Britain is connected directly to Christianity, and not to Judeo-Christianity. This is a huge leap that is entirely undocumented and ignores the fact that Israel is rooted in both Judaism and Christianity. As mentioned earlier, the Alt-Right is anti-Semitic, and through this blog post, Longshanks argues that whites have no connection to Judaism, only to Christianity.²⁰¹

There are two other almost identical posts on White Racial Identity entitled “Supporting Evidence for White Racial Identity Doctrine” and “Supporting Evidence for Christian Identity Doctrine” that refer directly to Aeneas as being a link to Israel and Christianity. Brett Light pulls from Sven Longshanks again. Longshanks ends both articles by arguing that the Whites who were descendants from these tribes of Israel knew that Christianity was theirs alone and “that Christ was a White European”.²⁰² As Longshanks writes in these posts, “the White Europeans are the children of Israel”, not the Jewish people.²⁰³

A second blog posts about Aryanism in reference to the *Aeneid* and Aeneas. It is entitled Aryan Nordic Alpine Aliens and has a byline of “Nordic aliens and other pro white information”.²⁰⁴ The author is unknown. In his post “Were the ancient Romans Nordic?”, the blogger argues in the affirmative. He states that there is literary evidence that “patricians were lighter [in pigmentation] than Plebians”, citing the *Aeneid* (without actual line citations) as

¹⁹⁹ Longshanks, whiteracialidentity.net/white-i-d-essentials/the-germanic-tribes-of-israel/. Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Sven Longshanks. “Supporting Evidence for Christian Identity Doctrine.” *White Racial Identity*, Brett Light, whiteracialidentity.net/2014/11/27/supporting-evidence-for-christian-identity-doctrine/. Sven Longshanks.

“Supporting Evidence for White Racial Identity Doctrine.” *White Racial Identity*, Brett Light, whiteracialidentity.net/white-i-d-essentials/supporting-evidence-for-white-racial-identity-doctrine/.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ “Were the Ancient Romans Nordic?” *Aryan Nordic Alpine Aliens*, 4 Oct, 2008, aryannordicalpinealiens.blogspot.com/2008/10/were-ancient-romans-nordic.html.

support for ancestral Romans having fair complexions with light hair.²⁰⁵ He argues that Virgil refers to the god Mercury, Lavinia, Turnus, Camilla, and Aeneas as golden-haired (*crinis flavos*), however he does not have any direct citations to the text to support this argument.²⁰⁶ The remainder of the post discusses archaeological evidence and further historical and literary evidence to prove Rome's Nordic descent. The anonymous author details Augustus' own purported yellow hair and Nordic facial features as well as those of members of the Flavian dynasty and Marcus Aurelius. Like the first blog, White Racial Identity, Aryan Nordic Alpine Aliens also believes the start of Aryanism is with Aeneas and Rome. Like many of the examples I have included in this chapter, this use of the *Aeneid* and Aeneas is again another example of the Alt-Right "self-mythologizing". They are attempting to ground their beliefs in a famous Western epic that they only view as espousing anti-immigration and pro-white values. In reality, as always, they have only read it superficially and never use direct quotations.

The last example I will discuss is a post on the website Return of Kings (ROK). Return of Kings has been deemed a hate group by the SPLC.²⁰⁷ It is run by Daryush Valizadeh who, according to the SPLC, advocates the "idea that women are intellectually inferior to men, worth only the sexual pleasure and fertility they can provide and should be prevented from voting".²⁰⁸ The SPLC labels his movement as "male supremacy" and anti-feminism, which as mentioned earlier, are key beliefs of the Alt-Right. On his website ROK, I found a post entitled "Pious Aeneas and a Passiontide Reflection on Impiety" written by Aurelius Moner. Moner's bio states that he is a "Catholic monk who has left the 'nice' philosophy of Liberalism behind having come

²⁰⁵ "Were the Ancient Romans Nordic?" *Aryan Nordic Alpine Aliens*, 4 Oct, 2008, aryannordicalpinealiens.blogspot.com/2008/10/were-ancient-romans-nordic.html.

²⁰⁶ I was only able to find lines referring to Lavinia and Aeneas as golden haired in the *Aeneid*: Lavinia 12.605 Aeneas 4.559

²⁰⁷ "Male Supremacy." *Southern Poverty Law Center*, www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/male-supremacy.

²⁰⁸ "Daryush Roosh Valizadeh." *Southern Poverty Law Center*, www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/daryush-roosh-valizadeh.

to understand that the judgment, authority and strength of the Patriarchy is necessary to save civilization from ‘nice’ people”.²⁰⁹ In his post, he discusses what piety is, arguing that piety is a manly virtue meant only for men that requires men to be dutiful to the family and country.

Aeneas, who is often referred to as pious Aeneas, is his main example of a pious man who does everything for his country and family. He writes that Aeneas “is one of the last pious and upright men, spared the divinely-decreed destruction of his civilization, that had grown decadent in the divine judgment”.²¹⁰ To Moner, Aeneas’ piety supports his argument that piety is a solely masculine trait. Moner writes that “only men can really safeguard these public virtues, because they require the greater male intellect, strength, emotional discipline and judgment for their effective implementation and defense in society”.²¹¹ Women are simply not capable of piety. Moner contends that our current society, especially the Left, suffers from impiety. Our society “reject[s] and dishonor[s] the very concept of God, the family, and an authentic nation with an authentic culture”.²¹² Piety, he argues, must be sought or else our society will continue to be degraded and corrupt.

Moner’s post recalls many of the Alt-Right’s beliefs and also recalls the belief that the Alt-Right is the defender of Western civilization. Only the Alt-Right is capable of bringing our society back from the degradation caused by women and multiculturalism. Again, this example shows how the *Aeneid* and Aeneas are being interpreted by the Alt-Right. A surface-level reading does indeed show that Aeneas is pious and duty-bound to his family and country, but like every example from this chapter, there is much more context that the Alt-Right is excluding.

²⁰⁹ Aurelius Moner. “Pious Aeneas and a Passiontide Reflection on Impiety.” *Return of Kings*, 18 Mar. 2016, www.returnofkings.com/83240/pious-aeneas-and-a-passiontide-reflection-on-impiety.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

Superficial readings of the *Aeneid* will always provide support for their beliefs as long as they pick and choose what content they want to include.

IV. Conclusion

Returning to the discussion of patrimony of Western civilization in my introduction to this chapter, I came across an article on the website AltRight.com, which is run by Richard Spencer whom I mentioned earlier as a leader of the Alt-Right movement. Interestingly, as of May 6th 2018, AltRight.com lost its GoDaddy domain and is no longer on the internet. GoDaddy states the website “crossed the line” in promoting violence.²¹³ The article, which I accessed several weeks prior to the website going offline, entitled “Cultural Appropriation and the West” is written by John Bruce Leonard, and it focuses on Homer’s *Iliad* and a TV adaptation of it that cast Black actors. Leonard poses a striking series of questions: “Will a Black man born to a Western society understand Homer? Will he understand Homer, that is to say, exclusively in a Homeric and Western spirit?”²¹⁴ Leonard argues that the Black actors are appropriating White culture in this TV adaptation. Usually the accusation of appropriation is put against Whites for appropriating other cultures. In response to this “appropriation” by Blacks, he states that we (Whites) should “rekindl[e] our ancient pride in the enduring caliber of our West, and re-appropriating our *own* culture, that glory of the West”.²¹⁵ Leonard believes we should “realize what is ours, what belongs to us exclusively as Westerners, and what no other peoples in all the world can touch in any essential way”.²¹⁶

²¹³ Adi Robertson. “GoDaddy pulled white nationalist Richard Spencer’s ‘Alt-Right’ site offline.” *The Verge*, 4 May 2018, www.theverge.com/2018/5/4/17320086/godaddy-domain-registrar-richard-spencer-altright-com-offline.

²¹⁴ John Bruce Leonard. “Cultural Appropriation and the West.” *Alt Right*, altright.com/2018/03/08/cultural-appropriation-and-the-west/. Accessed 24 Apr. 2018.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

Leonard, like many of the Alt-Right, sees himself as a defender of Western civilization. To these people, the Alt-Right is the last bastion of hope for Western civilization and White culture. They see themselves reflected in Greco-Roman culture from two thousand years ago, arguing that it is their heritage and only theirs. They also see themselves as becoming a minority in the multicultural world of today. Because of this heritage, they believe strongly that they have a right to use the Classics for their movement. But as I have discussed in this chapter, their use and applications of Greco-Roman culture are superficial at best. They miss the complex meanings of these texts, and sometimes are completely inaccurate, through their “self-mythologizing”, as I have shown with their use of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. It is clear though that it is dangerously easy for the Alt-Right to utilize Greco-Roman culture for their means. As Mathura Umachandran, a Classics graduate student at Princeton, wrote in an article for *Eidolon* entitled “Fragile, Handle with Care: On White Classicists”, Classicists need to “re-imagine the Greco-Roman past in such ways that it cannot serve as a screen for the projection of white supremacy or purity onto it”.²¹⁷ Classics can no longer be just a study by, for, and of elite white males.

²¹⁷ Mathura Umachandran. “Fragile, Handle with Care.” *Eidolon*, 5 Jun. 2017, eidolon.pub/fragile-handle-with-care-66848145cf29.



Figure E²¹⁸

²¹⁸ Virgil. *Breitbart*, 20 Jul 2017, www.breitbart.com/big-government/2017/07/20/virgil-five-points-about-the-politics-of-police-work-in-america-today/.

Conclusion

These three unique interpretations and readings of Virgil and his works illustrate exactly how multi-faceted those works are. An Italian dictator found pro-imperialist and pro-war values in Virgil's texts whereas Adam Parry and his cohort found anti-war and pro-victim values in the same texts. Members of the Alt-Right found and continue to find pro-white and anti-immigration values in these same words. These values and themes are all over the map, but it can be argued that they all fall into the same category. One of the biggest overarching themes of the *Aeneid* is war and all it entails. Thus, the values these three groups found tie into this theme of war and empire. The Italian fascists were focused entirely on the positive aspects of war and empire, whereas The Harvard School of Thought was focused on the negative aspects, and today, the Alt-Right focuses on the secondary effects, namely immigration and multiculturalism. The reader may be able to read the *Aeneid* in whatever way he wants due to his personal biases and experiences, but when it comes down to it, all of these interpretations and readings concern the effects of war and empire on the reader and interpreter of the texts.

Given the personal nature of these readings, it cannot truly be argued that one is right and the other is wrong. Some can be more compelling than others though. Mussolini's use of Virgil and his works is traditional and optimistic. He uses them in the way that Augustus presumably wanted them to be used, as propaganda to support his Italian revival.²¹⁹ But The Harvard School of Thought's readings of the *Aeneid* are some of the most complex and unique. Adam Parry, Wendell Clausen, Michael Putnam, and W. R. Johnson all found a darkness inside the text that had not yet been fully uncovered in scholarly works. All four delved deeply into the language itself, as opposed to performing a historical reading like Mussolini did. Their use of close readings revealed an *Aeneid* that provides insight into human vulnerabilities and human

²¹⁹ Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1939, 459-461.

relationships. To them, Virgil's *Aeneid* forces the reader to understand the morality and humanness of life as well as the consequences of choices and human error. They saw a Virgil who "insists that we strengthen ourselves to navigate conflicting uncertainties, opposing moral certitudes, and infuriating complexity, subtlety, and ambiguity as the surest, yet not sure, route in our paradoxical morality to create right outcomes".²²⁰ It is this uncertainty and struggle with morality that make the *Aeneid* so relevant. Virgil was able to capture correctly how emotions affect humans.

To The Harvard School, the attention to human suffering and human vulnerabilities are two of the most important aspects of the *Aeneid*. As mentioned in the second chapter, Parry writes that "the *Aeneid* enforces the fine paradox that all the wonders of the most powerful institution the world has ever known are not necessarily of greater importance than the emptiness of human suffering."²²¹ The Harvard School repeatedly asks, "Is victory worth the suffering?". Parry, Clausen, Putnam, and Johnson interpreted the text to be a paradox instead of propaganda. Although their dark negative reading of the text is complex and nuanced, their reading, nevertheless, falls into the other popular category of readings (pessimistic).

Therefore, the curve-ball reading has to be the Alt-Right's. The sudden use of Classics by the Alt-Right to gain authority and validity for their movement has astounded Classicists left and right. It cannot be denied that the vast majority of the study of Greco-Roman culture surrounds white elite males, but this does not give the Alt-Right license to appropriate it in such a dark and warped way. The Alt-Right believes that Greco-Roman culture is their patrimony. They believe this so vehemently that they find any slight against Western civilization ranging from casting Black actors in a TV show about Homer's *Iliad* to the so-called erasure of whites from college

²²⁰ Stephanie Quinn, "Conclusion." *Why Virgil?* Ed. Stephanie Quinn. Wauconda, Illinois: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc., 2000, 430.

²²¹ Parry, 123.

history courses as a direct attack. They deem themselves to be the defenders of Western civilization. Groups like Identity Evropa consistently use art and literature from Greco-Roman culture to support their beliefs. Thus, their use of Virgil and his *Aeneid* was only a matter of time. As discussed in the third chapter, the Alt-Right has found what they assert are anti-immigration undertones in the *Aeneid*. Coupled with the fact that Virgil was an elite intellectual white male, it is not surprising that they have appropriated his text.

This reading of the *Aeneid*, however, is by far the most egregious. Mussolini's and The Harvard School of Thought's readings make sense given what the text says and the historical aspects of it, but the Alt-Right's reading does not make nearly the same sense. They blatantly miss that the entire story is about a group of refugees finding success in Latium. Aeneas and Lavinia's marriage is interracial. Jupiter even advocates for their marriage and for the assimilation of the Trojans into Latium. The Alt-Right argues that Amata's and Turnus' anti-Trojan views stem from anti-immigration sentiments. But these are not innate anti-immigration sentiments that they are feeling. Juno has sent the Furies to stir these feelings of hatred inside them against the Trojans. It is a madness that has overcome them. They are not in their right minds when they speak of their anti-Trojan views. Thus, their so-called anti-immigration beliefs are a sickness, which in turn equates anti-immigration beliefs with said sickness. If the Alt-Right accurately understood this scene, they would see that by believing that crazed Amata and Turnus are truly anti-immigration, they are making a mockery of their own anti-immigration beliefs.

The Alt-Right would do well to delve more into the text of these elite white males if they want to root their movement in the truth. By doing such surface readings of these texts, they leave themselves open to contempt and derision by those who do understand these texts. Although I have argued that the *Aeneid* can be read in countless ways due to personal biases and

experiences, there are some readings, more accurately appropriations, that simply cannot stand.

The *Aeneid* cannot be cherry-picked to support people's beliefs. It must be understood as a whole epic with all of its complexities and nuances. Both the triumphant and the defeated must be recognized to appreciate Virgil's message of a mixed victory. "Don't dare assail this divine *Aeneid*, but prostrate, adore the tracks it leaves."²²²

²²² Martin Luther, *Adversus Armatum Virum Cochlaeum*.

Bibliography

- “About Us.” *Identity Evropa*, www.identityevropa.com/about-us. Accessed 6 May 2018.
- @AeneasAgrippa. *Twitter*. <https://twitter.com/AeneasAgrippa>.
- @AeneasAgrippa. “The radicalized political left think even anodyne references to “Anglo-Americanism” should be cause for some sort of punishment. Why is this? Perhaps their worldview necessitates the destruction of Americas heritage, in order to remake society into a post Anglo socialist union.” *Twitter*, 13 Feb. 2018, 8:51 p.m., twitter.com/AeneasAgrippa/status/963636819161223168.
- “Alt-Right.” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/Alt-Right. Accessed 16 April 2018.
- “Augustus Sol Invictus.” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/augustus-sol-invictus. Accessed 16 April 2018.
- Bokhari, Allum and Milo Yiannopoulos. “An Establishment Conservative’s Guide to the Alt-Right.” *Breitbart*, 29 Mar. 2016, www.breitbart.com/tech/2016/03/29/an-establishment-conservatives-guide-to-the-Alt-Right/. Accessed 16 April 2018.
- Caldwell, Christopher. “What the Alt-Right Really Means.” *The New York Times*, 2 Dec. 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/12/02/opinion/sunday/what-the-Alt-Right-really-means.html. Accessed 16 April 2018.
- Clausen, Wendell. *A Commentary on Virgil Eclogues*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Clausen, Wendell. “An Interpretation of the *Aeneid*.” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*. 68 (1964): 139-147.
- “Darush Roosh Valizadeh.” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/daryush-roosh-valizadeh. Accessed 23 April 2018.
- Dozier, Curtis. *Pharos: Doing Justice to the Classics*, Vassar College, 2017-2018, pages.vassar.edu/pharos/. Accessed 16 April 2018.
- Eliot, T.S. *What is a Classic?* London, England: Faber, 1945.
- “Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ Speech.” *The Telegraph*, 6 Nov. 2007, www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html. Accessed 17 April 2018.
- Fantazzi, Charles. “Homage to Virgil.” *Vergilius* 29 (1983): 1-11.

- Fantazzi, Charles. "Homage to Virgil." *Why Virgil?* Ed. Stephanie Quinn. Wauconda, Illinois: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc., 2000.
- Farrell, Joseph. "The Vergilian Century." *Vergilius* 47 (2001): 11-28.
- FranzK. "Piazza Virgiliana a Mantova2." *Wikimedia Commons*, 6 May 2011, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Piazza_Virgiliana_a_Mantova2.jpg. Accessed 6 May 2018.
- Giardina, Andrea. "The Fascist Myth of Romanity." *Estudos Avançados*. 22.62 (2008): 55-76.
- Gillingham, Allan. "Viktor Poeschl's 'Die Dichtkunst Virgils'." *Vergilius*. 5 (1959): 18-28.
- Giralt, Sebastià. "Monumento a Virgilio, Poesia eroica, Mantova." *Flickr*, 1 Jan 2003, www.flickr.com/photos/sebastiagiralt/226516706/in/photolist-ct5XeG-oy7rDD-RtEBu7-ownXu1-2xiwSY-ouHXrF-2xiyf1-7VDwjZ-2xizpf-8Mjtb8-owrEay-oeQHng-othcKN-7PxEjE-m1Xwu-m1Xws-m1Xww-5kCMEe-oseR1i-owojvT-QPkyyg-owo3fd-3Gxmk4-RSpzE8-o6SbKL-26gBce-QLQhWW-y8kd6s-yqvMwV-ypATE3-y966ND-y9Koohof2R9g-oweArq-uWN8gn-yoUeR6-ow2qof-yoZz18-y7VwFa-RtEtVE-RtECVd-N5rqRr-oeqyk7-yop7GV-oenH9W-yqf3z2-y6D4pJ-oeSsrn-nbLmST-7TJgnB/. Accessed 6 May 2018.
- Giralt, Sebastià. "Monumento a Virgilio, Poesia pastorale, Mantova." *Flickr*, 1 Jan 2003, www.flickr.com/photos/sebastiagiralt/226516710/in/photolist-ct5XeG-oy7rDD-RtEBu7-ownXu1-2xiwSY-ouHXrF-2xiyf1-7VDwjZ-2xizpf-8Mjtb8-owrEay-oeQHng-othcKN-7PxEjE-m1Xwu-m1Xws-m1Xww-5kCMEe-oseR1i-owojvT-QPkyyg-owo3fd-3Gxmk4-RSpzE8-o6SbKL-26gBce-QLQhWW-y8kd6s-yqvMwV-ypATE3-y966ND-y9Koohof2R9g-oweArq-uWN8gn-yoUeR6-ow2qof-yoZz18-y7VwFa-RtEtVE-RtECVd-N5rqRr-oeqyk7-yop7GV-oenH9W-yqf3z2-y6D4pJ-oeSsrn-nbLmST-7TJgnB/. Accessed 6 May 2018.
- Haecker, Theodor. *Vergil, Vater des Abendlandes*. Leipzig, Germany: Hegner-Bücherei, Kösel, München, 1931.
- Harrison, S. J. "Some Views of the *Aeneid* in the Twentieth Century." *Oxford Readings in Vergil's Aeneid*. Ed. S.J. Harrison. United States: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Harrison, S. J. "A Voyage Around the Harvard School." *Classical World*. 111.1 (2017): 76-78.
- Hitler, Adolf. *Mein Kampf*. Munich, Germany: Franz Eher Nachfolger, 1932.
- "Identity Evropa." *Southern Poverty Law Center*, www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/identity-evropa. Accessed 6 May 2018.
- Johnson, W. R. *Darkness Visible: A Study of Vergil's Aeneid*. Berkley, California: University of California Press, 1976.

- Knox, Bernard. "The Serpent and the Flame: The Imagery of the Second Book of the *Aeneid*." *The American Journal of Philology*. 71.4 (1950): 379-400.
- Kronenberg, Leah. "Epicurean Pastoral: Daphnis as an Allegory for Lucretius in Vergil's *Eclogues*." *Vergilius*. 62 (2016): 25-56.
- Lee, Guy. *Virgil The Eclogues*. New York, New York: Penguin Books, 1987.
- Leonard, John Bruce. "Cultural Appropriation and the West." *Alt Right*, altright.com/2018/03/08/cultural-appropriation-and-the-west/. Accessed 24 April 2018.
- Lewis, C.S. "Virgil and the Subject of Secondary Epic." *Virgil*. Ed. Steele Commager. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966.
- Light, Brett. *White Racial Identity*, <https://whiteracialidentity.net/>. Accessed 16 April 2018.
- Longshanks, Sven. "The Germanic Tribes of Israel." *White Racial Identity*, Brett Light, whiteracialidentity.net/white-i-d-essentials/the-germanic-tribes-of-israel/. Accessed 16 April 2018.
- Longshanks, Sven. "Supporting Evidence for Christian Identity Doctrine." *White Racial Identity*, Brett Light, whiteracialidentity.net/2014/11/27/supporting-evidence-for-christian-identity-doctrine/. Accessed 16 April 2018.
- Longshanks, Sven. "Supporting Evidence for White Racial Identity Doctrine." *White Racial Identity*, Brett Light, whiteracialidentity.net/white-i-d-essentials/supporting-evidence-for-white-racial-identity-doctrine/. Accessed 16 April 2018.
- Luther, Martin. *Adversus Armatum Virum Cochlaeum*.
- "Male Supremacy." *Southern Poverty Law Center*, www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/male-supremacy. Accessed 23 April 2018.
- Martindale, Charles. "The Classic of all Europe." *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*. Ed. Charles Martindale. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- McConnell, Scott. "The Enoch Powell Question." *The American Conservative*, 8 Mar. 2018, www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-enoch-powell-question/. Accessed 16 April 2018.
- Miller, Nick. "BBC 'normalising racism' by broadcasting Rivers of Blood speech." *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 Apr. 2018, www.smh.com.au/world/europe/bbc-normalising-racism-by-broadcasting-rivers-of-blood-speech-20180413-p4z9cn.html. Accessed 16 April 2018.

- Moner, Aurelius. "Pious Aeneas and a Passiontide Reflection on Impiety." *Return of Kings*, 18 Mar. 2016, www.returnofkings.com/83240/pious-aeneas-and-a-passiontide-reflection-on-impiety. Accessed 23 April 2018.
- Mussolini, Benito. *My Autobiography*. New York, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928.
- "Mussolini storms Abyssinia: report in the Observer, May 1936." *The Guardian*, 5 Sept. 2009, www.theguardian.com/world/2009/sep/05/italy-abyssinia-second-world-war. Accessed 3 February 2018.
- Mynors, R. A. B. *Oxford Classical Texts: P. Vergili Maronis: Opera*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1969.
- Nelis, Jan. "Constructing Fascist Identity: Benito Mussolini and the Myth of Romanita." *The Classical World* 100.4 (2007): 391-415.
- Nelis, Jan. "Fascist Modernity, Religion, and the Myth of Rome." *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany*. Ed. Helen Roche and Kyriakos Demetriou. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2018.
- "New Criticism." *Britannica*, www.britannica.com/art/New-Criticism. Accessed 26 March 2018.
- @NothingBut_Furor. *Twitter*. twitter.com/NothinBut_Furor.
- Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*. Eds. Edoardo and Duilio Susmel. Florence, Italy: La Fenice, 1951-1963.
- Parry, Adam. "The Two Voices of Virgil's 'Aeneid'." *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and Classics*. 2.4 (1963): 66-80.
- Pöschl, Viktor. *The Art of Vergil: Image and Symbol in the Aeneid*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1962.
- Putnam, Michael. *Poetry of the Aeneid*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965.
- Quinn, Stephanie. "Conclusion." *Why Virgil?* Ed. Stephanie Quinn. Wauconda, Illinois: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc., 2000.
- Robertson, Adi. "GoDaddy pulled white nationalist Richard Spencer's 'Alt-Right' site offline." *The Verge*, 4 May 2018, www.theverge.com/2018/5/4/17320086/godaddy-domain-registrar-richard-spencer-alt-right-com-offline. Accessed 6 May 2018.
- Roche, Helen. "'Distant Models?' Italian Fascism, National Socialism and the Lure of the Classics." *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany*. Ed. Helen Roche and Kyriakos Demetriou. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2018.

- Schmidt, Ernst A. "The Meaning of Vergil's 'Aeneid': American and German Approaches." *The Classical World* 94.2 (2001): 145-171.
- Scott, Kenneth. "Mussolini and the Roman Empire." *The Classical Journal*. 27.9 (1932): 645-657.
- Stack, Liam. "Alt-Right, Alt-Left, Antifa: A Glossary of Extremist Language." *The New York Times*, 15 Aug. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/us/politics/alt-left-Alt-Right-glossary.html. Accessed 16 April 2018.
- Summers, Rachel. "Enoch Powell's Infamous Speech." *The Revolutionary Conservative*, 27 Apr. 2017, therevolutionaryconservative.com/articles/04272017enoch-powells-infamous-speech/#.Wt9H6cgh125. Accessed 16 April 2018.
- Syme, Ronald. *The Roman Revolution*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1939.
- Tarrant, R. J. "Poetry and power: Virgil's poetry in contemporary context." *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*. Ed. Charles Martindale. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- @TrumpiusAeneas. *Twitter*. <https://twitter.com/TrumpiusAeneas?lang=en>.
- @TrumpiusAeneas. "Loser Odysseus claiming my travel ban an infringement of his human rights. Sad and wrong. He should be home by now anyway. FACT!" *Twitter*. 16 Mar. 2017, 5:51 a.m., twitter.com/TrumpiusAeneas/status/842357549936574464.
- @TrumpiusAeneas. "Gotta secure our borders if we want to #MakeTroyGreatAgain" *Twitter*. 17 Mar. 2017, 12:10 a.m., twitter.com/TrumpiusAeneas/status/842634168609726464.
- @TrumpiusAeneas. "More LIES! My weekend with Evander at Rom-a-Tibo is all about trade, borders, immigration and empire. FACT!" *Twitter*. 18 Mar. 2017, 1:17 a.m., twitter.com/TrumpiusAeneas/status/843013548922028032.
- Tyrrell, Ian. "What, exactly, is 'American Exceptionalism'?" *The Week*, 21 Oct. 2016, theweek.com/articles/654508/what-exactly-american-exceptionalism. Accessed 6 May 2018.
- Umachandran, Mathura. "Fragile, Handle with Care." *Eidolon*, 5 Jun. 2017, eidolon.pub/fragile-handle-with-care-66848145cf29. Accessed 24 April 2018.
- L'Enciclopedia Virgiliana*. Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1984-1991.
- The Virgil Encyclopedia*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2014.

- Virgil. "America has been warned: Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*." *Breitbart*, 22 Nov. 2014, www.breitbart.com/big-government/2014/11/22/america-has-been-warned-virgil/. Accessed 16 April 2018.
- Virgil. *Breitbart*, 20 Jul 2017, www.breitbart.com/big-government/2017/07/20/virgil-five-points-about-the-politics-of-police-work-in-america-today/. Accessed 6 May 2018.
- Virtusincertus. "Statue of Virgil." *Flickr*, 1 Nov. 2009, www.flickr.com/photos/79346113@N00/4094578339. Accessed 6 May 2018.
- Warren, Rosanna. "The End of the Aeneid." *Poets and Critics Read Vergil*. Ed. Sarah Spence. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2001.
- "Were the Ancient Romans Nordic?" *Aryan Nordic Alpine Aliens*, 4 Oct, 2008, aryannordicalpinealiens.blogspot.com/2008/10/were-ancient-romans-nordic.html. Accessed 16 April 2018.
- Zanker, Paul. *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1988.
- Zetzel, James. "Rome and its traditions." *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*. Ed. Charles Martindale. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Zetzel, James. "The 'Harvard School': A Historical Note by an Alumnus." *Classical World*. 111.1 (2017): 125-128.
- Ziolkowski, Theodore. *Virgil and the Moderns*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Ziolkowski, Theodore. *Classicism of the Twenties*. Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2015.
- Zuckerberg, Donna. "How to Be a Good Classicist Under a Bad Emperor." *Eidolon*, 21 Nov. 2016, eidolon.pub/how-to-be-a-good-classicist-under-a-bad-emperor-6b848df6e54a. Accessed 16 April 2018.