

Edan Dekel, *Virgil's Homeric Lens. Routledge monographs in classical studies*. New York; London: Routledge, 2012. Pp. ix, 166. ISBN 9780415890403. £85.

*Virgil's Homeric Lens* offers an original and illuminating perspective on three fundamental poems. It is often overlooked that since Virgil's use of Homer involves three different epics, there are three distinct relationships between the poems (p. 1). Dekel puts it beyond doubt that the *Aeneid* alludes to Homer in light of how the *Odyssey*, and often specifically Odysseus, had looked back to the *Iliad*. As such, the *Odyssey* provides Virgil with a ready-made model of Homeric intertextuality, in which allusion is partisan and focalized. Virgil creates a complex relationship between mythical and poetic chronology: since most of the events narrated in the *Aeneid* occur between those of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Aeneas can spin a version of the Trojan War and its aftermath which rivals Odysseus's story even as it learns from it, and which draws on Odysseus's narrative of events which have not yet taken place. The case is supported by a series of doxographically rich readings mostly from books 1-3 of the *Aeneid* and their Homeric models. D.'s compact *libellus* will stimulate debate about the applicability of his thesis to the Homeric content of the *Aeneid*'s later books, as considered in the closing pages.

The argument proceeds inductively over four mutually supporting chapters, 'Primary Colors' (1-28), 'Iliadic Refraction' (29-62), 'Odyssean Diffraction' (63-89), and 'Virgilian Reflection' (90-116), which sustain the optical metaphor, inspired by St. Paul and Macrobius, from the title to the last sentence of the final chapter.

'Primary Colors' explores the dominance of ancient bipartite assessments of

Virgil's Homeric allusion which describe the *Aeneid* as an *Odyssey* followed by an *Iliad*. By way of entry, the formulations of Servius, Macrobius and Donatus's *Life* are acutely scrutinized to reveal the shortcomings of the binary approach. In particular, the *Odyssey* is exposed as already containing an *Iliad* followed by an *Odyssey*. D. follows Hinds in emphasizing throughout the importance of systematic allusion and bidirectional hermeneutics, and critiques modern views to delineate his own position. Conte's 'code model' and 'exemplary model' presuppose a unitary take on the Homeric corpus; while both 'window-allusion' and Cairns's view of the *Aeneid* as 'a unitary *Odyssey* with significant Iliadic episodes' imply for D. that the intermediary text in a series of three has a 'passive' rather than a 'transformative' status. It might have been argued, as Conte and others do, that tragedy 'refracted' Homeric epic for Virgil, but instead, D. adapts Barchiesi's 'trace' metaphor from *La traccia del modello*: dynamic Homeric traces in the *Aeneid* lead the reader back to reflect interpretatively on its own two source texts and how they relate to one another.

Accordingly, Ch. 2, 'Iliadic Refraction,' turns to the relationship between Homer's two epics, beginning with a rewarding discussion of familiar pronouncements from Aristotle, Eustathius, and at greater length, Longinus. Typical lines are sketched in briskly – the *Odyssey* as a sequel that focuses on the aftermath and the domestic cost of Iliadic warfare, all from a Greek perspective – before the chapter branches out into some novel turns, in a Pucci-esque idiom that privileges Homeric word-repetition, paranomasia, and structural echoes involving role reversals within and across the two epics. From the first mention of Orestes at the beginning of book 1, the *Odyssey* replaces the *Iliad*'s dominant parental perspective with that of the next generation. This is well established for Telemachus, and Odysseus himself is

seen to be the one to focalize his own relationship with his parents, rather than vice versa, as happens with Achilles and Thetis in the *Iliad*. The tendrils of the argument multiply in a section about *akos*, *achos*, and *pothos* in the two poems: the latent potential for sorrow expressed in Achilles's name (*achos-laos*) finds its realization in the *Odyssey*'s lamentations for deceased heroes, both in the Telemachy and in the Nekyia. Here the *Aethiopsis* is appropriately invoked as a tertium between the two monumental epics. There are excellent remarks about what is at stake in the contest for the arms of Achilles. Once again, Odysseus's point of view is the essential focus of the sometimes blurred discussion: in his encounters with Ajax and Achilles in the Nekyia, he stage-manages a triumph of his own pragmatic values over Ajax's brute strength and Achilles's egoism. For example, he hijacks Achilles's progeny by casting Neoptolemus as an excellent orator, third after himself and Nestor.

Ch. 3, 'Odyssean Diffraction,' gives us an *Aeneid* thoroughly enmeshed in the rhetorical trickery of the *Odyssey*'s characters. D. traces Quint's celebrated distinction between 'victors' and losers' epics' back to the *Odyssey* itself: Odysseus repeats the Iliadic and basic Achillean pattern of absence, return, and retribution; in such a way, however, as to cast Achilles and more broadly the Greeks as losers, and himself as a victor, asserting control over the *Iliad*'s tradition. In *Aeneid* book 2, Aeneas follows Odysseus in commandeering and subverting the tradition of Achillean heroism: his version of Neoptolemus's brutal treatment of Priam holds up a mirror to the manner of Achilles, while alluding to Odysseus's excessive killing of the suitors; at the same time, Neoptolemus's sarcastic vaunt to Priam is the stuff of Odysseus's later praise to Achilles in the Nekyia. All of this is carefully documented, and D. notes the uncomfortable implications of Aeneas's slant on Achilles and Odysseus for

his own allusive replay of their triumphant deeds in the later books of the *Aeneid*. The remainder of this chapter examines the purpose and function of storytelling in the *Odyssey* (mostly Odysseus and Demodocus), and what Aeneas learns from it: faced with the Carthaginians' perceptions and Dido's insinuations about his own Iliadic failures, especially his duels with Diomedes and Achilles, Aeneas chooses to deflect criticism about his behaviour at the fall of Troy by setting up three targets, Odysseus, Achilles, and Neoptolemus. Dido's benign reaction attests to the power of Aeneas's performance (p. 88).

Ch. 4, 'Virgilian Reflection,' uses Hellanicus' fragment about Aeneas founding Rome 'with Odysseus' (*met' Odusseôs*) to think about the *Odyssey* as complicit in the *Aeneid's* literary project, and about the *Aeneid* as a meta-*Odyssey*, taking us to the *meta* of the Trojans' journey at Drepanum (*Aen.* 3.714, p. 109). Further readings from books 2 and 3 grow out of and consolidate the conclusions of previous chapters, with restless probing of Homeric sources and their implications for Aeneas's attempts to create a definitively authoritative narrative and to avoid repeating the ignominies of the *Iliad*. Aeneas wanders the streets of Troy as Odysseus ravages the city, until Aeneas catches a glimpse of Odysseus as he searches for Creusa. Aeneas and Odysseus manage to avoid each other on their respective and simultaneous odysseys, while Aeneas succeeds in avoiding Odysseus's leadership blunders by reaching Carthage with most of his crew intact. A final section briefly surveys Aeneas's rampages in books 10 and 12 as reflections of Neoptolemus's post-Odyssean Iliadic viciousness.

'Itur in antiquam silvam,' wrote Mynors of his journey into the Virgilian MS

tradition. The complex and imbricated nature of D.'s sources requires detailed argumentation and entails a somewhat involuted prose style and expository structure that demand the reader's closest concentration, especially since the endnotes contain material beyond citations which might have been transplanted to the body text. This said, *Virgil's Homeric Lens* makes a substantial and refreshing contribution to the study of Homer as well as of Virgil's use of Homer. It will attract the serious attention it deserves, as well as its own *anaplêrôsis*.

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