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Review of *Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring the Aeneid from the Twelfth Century to Chaucer* by Ch. Baswell

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Author

Hexter, Ralph Jay

Publication Date

1996-03-01

Peer reviewed

Baswell, Christopher. *Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring the Aeneid from the Twelfth Century to Chaucer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Pp. xviii, 438. \$59.95. ISBN: ISBN 0-521-46294-0.

Reviewed by:

Ralph Hexter
University of California, Berkeley

Now that we have (or have had) "New History," "New Philology," and "New Latin," it seems inevitable that even within that subset of studies of Classical *Nachleben* we produce "New Reception Studies." Reception history as well as the concomitant reception aesthetics were themselves new not so very long ago. What was new about them is their reversal of some traditional poles of literary history. Instead of suggesting, explicitly or implicitly, that the ancient author "influenced" later readers, students of reception focus on the intellectual context(s) of the recipients and what they make of the author(s) they read. This point is now old.

And yet, why is it that we come back again and again to organizing even our receptive studies around the major authors, usually taken one-by-one? I think this bespeaks not so much nostalgia for old-style "influence" studies as it is an organizational strategy. Reception is cumulative. And while medieval readers of, say, Virgil's *Aeneid* (to take a random example) are reading it against their reading of Ovid and their reading of Christian scriptures, the principal intertexts -- for there is interpretive intertextuality, too -- cluster around other readers and readings of the *Aeneid*. A Vergilian image might be the shades that cluster around a living visitor to the underworld; that this is also a Dantean image only proves my point. A more modern analogy (and for this venue particularly apt) might be an internet chat room extended across time. In unpacking the discourse that for over a millennium occurs around and about the *Aeneid*, Baswell is serving as our guide in that notional and often interactive space. Of course all the participants are, whether singly or in groups, involved in other networks and bring those elements to our Virgil line. However, in tracking and tracing the myriad intersecting nets that pop onto and pop out of (the latter usually only temporarily) the interactive Virgil space, Baswell is offering us a more sophisticated version of reception studies.

Reference to media, to interactivity, even hypertext, pop-ups and touchscreens, would by no means be irrelevant to Baswell's book, which is deeply committed to analyzing the historic medium of Virgil transmission, the manuscript. The accretion of accessus and biographies before and after texts, of manifold commentaries in the margins, and of glosses between the lines, makes these manuscripts already multiple and multi-level; a reading process (at times reconstructable) that at times activates some of the material and ignores other renders the medieval process of reading the *Aeneid* from multiple or even one manuscript already a hypertextual experience. (For those who demand multiple media, some manuscripts are illustrated, as Baswell describes; others -- not discussed here -- transmit melodies to which certain passages were changed.)

Baswell relegates the technical descriptions of thirty-seven Virgil manuscripts written in England to an appendix. In the body of his text he gives us what I would call a living codicology. He aims to historicize not only modes of transmission but reading itself. He asks us to "suspend certain assumptions about textuality and its boundaries, and in particular, our tendency to distinguish between the book... and its text" (5). The "unstable frontier" begins at the space between and around the very verses of the poem. Readers literally participate in the ongoing (re)production of meaning, and within and out of this virtually infinite space Baswell has identified four major trends or tendencies which he calls "versions": the pedagogical, the allegorical (divided into two, the recondite/natural-scientific, on the one hand, and the moral, on the other), and the romance. The last is largely but not exclusively vernacular, but in no case are these strict boundaries. Baswell offers many examples of crossfertilization between and among these traditions (which are of course analytical categories). The basic textual system (by which I mean text *cum commento*) is always open to divergent productions of meaning. Indeed, a particular reader or manuscript-user can derive from a manuscript that appears to offer one version an utterly different interpretation; only if he -- or she -- adds to the layers of commentary or writes a new text will there be written evidence of this transvaluation.

Baswell's book is rewarding throughout, dense with information and intelligent insight, and unfailingly readable. The documentation is formidable (the 1037 notes comprise 95 of the volume's 438 pages); the index is also helpful. (It is also beautifully produced [that the last line of p. 356 is repeated as the first of p. 357 may be the only flaw].) Indeed, the whole is so rich and so clearly articulated, that I can be most helpful by giving readers a sense of each of Baswell's chapter's in sequence. If my review runs long, consider that in some respects this book is really a double-decker, for after the first four manuscript-based chapters, which could well have stood alone (pp. 1-167, including "Introduction"), there come two chapters and an "envoi" with detailed interpretations of the *Roman d'Eneas* and major portions of two of Chaucer's poems (pp. 168-284).

In chapter 1, "*Auctor to auctoritas: modes of access to Virgil in medieval England*," Baswell sketches the broader context of a culture impregnated with readings of Virgil. He compares that culture's supersaturation with Virgil to the modern "epiphenomenon" of "Freud" whose presence is hardly limited to those who have studied his writings. And even those engaged in serious study of texts bring to them a host of ideas; for the early period Baswell instances the treacherous Aeneas of Dictys and Dares. (The reader might well want more specific dates than "early medieval" (18) for these authors: Dictys seems to go

back to the second or third century, the Latin translation of part known to the Western Middle Ages probably to the fourth; Dares is probably fifth century.)

Baswell's subtle insight on the workings of these often contradictory traditions is that "The historical tradition...does not merely attack Virgil's hero; it also diminishes his authority; for even when it accepts Vergil's historicity, it reduces his text to a cyclic fragment without any inherent predominance over other parts of the narrative. Medieval Virgilianism thus swings between awed respect for the *Aeneid* as an almost inspired text, and casual dismissal of it as an unreliable or minor story" (21). Visual representations, many based on contemporary illustrations of Biblical history, provide another source for imaginations entering into and subtly guiding understanding in unpredictable directions. (Due to the distribution of evidence, most of the examples he adduces happen to be continental.) Correctly he observes that "Using biblical models to help visualize ancient episodes, and particularly the supernatural, is not the same as the conscious Christianization taking place in some temporary allegorical commentaries" (24). Rather, some of the cycles offer parallels with Baswell's "romance perspective," revealing "a new urgency of feminine voice, and new efforts at establishing feminine power." (Note a rare oversight: *pace* Baswell [25-26], the opening lines of book 5 of the *Aeneid* also blend the Trojans' departure with a vision of Dido's fiery death ("flammis," 5.4), even if Aeneas (characteristically) doesn't know what he's seeing ["causa latet," 5.5; but lines 5-7 suggest they fear the worst].)

In chapter 2, "Pedagogical exegesis of Virgil in medieval England: Oxford, All Souls College 82," Baswell analyzes a twelfth-century English school manuscript with three centuries of annotations. Ending up in All Souls in 1438, it may have belonged first to a tutor of Henry II. In this one manuscript (as in others of its ilk), one sees displayed the continuity of the "pedagogical" tradition. As I have argued for the Ovidian tradition (noted pp. 333f., n 43), so in the Virgilian most school commentaries have a purpose other than allegorical. As Baswell says of the commentaries he has studied, "The central tradition of medieval Virgilian commentary consistently aims to regain some sense of the original setting of the *Aeneid* (or at least of Virgil's Rome), perceived as different in language, religion, social order and geography" (48). In the case of Virgil and unlike Ovid, this tradition has a late antique anchor: Servius.

The great mass of Servian material is severely abbreviated in the high medieval school texts Baswell has studied, and Baswell well describes the "flattening" this simplified matter combined with generic interlinear glossing brings about (see 55 esp.) Importantly, however, Baswell argues that these "non-specific, 'flattening' glosses...could be said to open up new and alternate spaces for the epic's reception, expanding the systems of 'blanks' (as Iser calls them) in which the reader can operate" (62).

The third level (late fourteenth century) shows the influence of the commentary attributed to Anselm of Laon, after Servius' the next most widely distributed Virgil commentary, itself heavily dependent on Servius but much less so than mere abbreviators of Servius. Among "Anselm's" additions are references to Biblical chronology and to Jesus as the bringer of peace in Augustus' time. In the third level of commentary in AS 82, Baswell finds "a well-trained medieval mind with access to an apparently decent library makin[ing] selective use of earlier commentaries such as Servius and 'Anselm' to reinstitute, indeed to emphasize, those differentiating details of the Virgilian imaginative landscape which we saw beginning to melt away in Commentaries I and II" (69). Baswell's analysis of Commentary III's patterns of use of Servius and "Anselm" bears this out. Even more: from the appearance of "topic- headings" and signs that "this particular commentator went over some episodes more than once," Baswell "conjecture[s] a reader sensitive to the repeatable pleasures of the text..." (71).

In chapter 3, "Spiritual allegory, platonizing cosmology, and the Boethian *Aeneid* in medieval England: Cambridge, Peterhouse College 158," Baswell again unravels a multi-layered history of reading. "The *Aeneid* in P 158 is bracketed at beginning and end with two allegorizing commentaries, the second much more persistent and systematic than the first" (85). Here again Baswell, the reader of books, not merely texts, referring to the arrangement of *accessus* and end notes, observes, "The codicological organization of P 158...asserts the presence of the *magister* or reader as an agent far more independent of the *auctor*, and, both before and after a reader turns to the central poem, this manuscript offers on separate leaves an active, even creative mediating consciousness engaged with, yet distinct from, that *auctor*" (86-87). Baswell helpfully reaches back to late-antique stages, e.g., Servius, Macrobius, and Fulgentius, to trace the tradition of Virgil the polymath. These summaries will be helpful for most readers, and make the book a broader survey of Virgilianism than the "in medieval England" of the title suggests.

As suggestive as Baswell is about modes of reading implied or enabled by such commentaries, he is (rightly) circumspect about the difficulties of describing precisely their modes of formation (see esp 108-9, "aural reception," "notes taken from a classroom lecture").

His reading of "Bernard" is too subtle to be recapitulated here. As Baswell describes it, "Bernard" tracks an asymptotic ascent via the *artes* to truth, an approach that can never attain the ultimate goal, since the *artes* are secular. He then reads this "symbolic pilgrimage" of Aeneas and the reader against the masterplot of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. Indeed, Baswell argues that the *Consolation of Philosophy* is, or at least was, always already Virgilian, that is, that Boethius in the sixth century included a notionally allegorized *Aeneid* as a subtext for his *Consolation*. Subsequent readings of Baswell may convince me; at the very least, Baswell shows how richly one can read the one Latin text against the other, as we know multiple medieval exegetes of both works did (cp. esp. 126). Here we have one of those key links between distinct networks of readings and commentaries I described in my opening paragraphs.

So fine-grained is Baswell's analysis that he can locate and characterize centers such as the early thirteenth-century West County, especially Hereford and Exeter. However, Baswell's consideration of English borrowings from France and other, particular English contributions, raises a question that Baswell seems not to broach: what sense if any did these allegorizers (say) have of their own Englishness? To what degree can one write a nationally-based study within medieval Latin culture? I have no doubt one can, especially after one has crossed the divide into the vernacular(s), some of which at least will have bled back into the *nationes* within Latin letters. Baswell's study places him in an enviable position to ponder such matters, and he does not.

Chapter 4, "Moral allegory and the *Aeneid* in the time of London, BL Additional 27304," makes for a fitting conclusion to what I above termed Baswell's "first book," as it presents a complex case of multiple layers, the third contributed by a Norwich commentator working after 1381 (the peasant's revolt) who himself had a remarkably mixed set of agendas. By his interventions

"the *Aeneid* is rendered a hortatory text, constantly urging the reader to participate in the social and religious structures which the marginalia are progressively deriving from the authoritative work" (152). Here and elsewhere "we witness the manuscript being marginally unpacked, its content parceled out for use in new contexts, and made accessible without an extended reading of the poem" (153). At times, this commentator's Aeneas is not just a virtuous man or Christian but Christ. Despite, or rather on the basis of his "waywardness," Baswell dares to suggest a fourteenth-century "readerly experience" that "combines emotional involvement, stylistic sensitivity, historical imagination, and interpretive response" (160).

The value of tracing the courses of manuscripts as they move emerges from the contrast Baswell can draw between the objects of his most intense study: "All Souls 82 gained a last layer of medieval pedagogical commentary and then moved into the university," hence its "distanced and distancing reading of the epic." In contrast, "Add27304 moved into (or stayed in) the hands of the friars, and entered the more popular tradition of sententious moralizing," its "reading of the *Aeneid*...aimed largely at persuasion and the hortatory application of the letter to local place and contemporary time" (163).

Chapter 5, "The Romance *Aeneid*," focuses largely but not exclusively on the *Roman d'Eneas*. "The absorption of marginal comment and even...of marginal episode into the vernacular narrative is itself a part of the poem's romance dilation, by which it looks backward to the mythic roots of its history, and forward to the imperial genealogy its hero will engender" (173). But elements of "romance dilation," the principle opposing "epic linearity," can enter Latin texts and even Virgil's original (via commentary). Indeed it seems to me that the tension is inherent in Virgil's original, nowhere more -- and more famously -- than in the Dido episode. No wonder then that those romance elements are picked up and developed by medieval Latin poets particularly around the figure of Dido (e.g., "Anna soror"). Others highlight imperial notes, such as Pierre de Saintes in "Viribus, arte, minis," with its simplified (and moral) scheme of *translatio imperii* against which the romance of dilation (and women) is set in tension.

The complexity of Baswell's analysis of the *Eneas* and its Virgilian and Ovidian intertexts changes the tempo of the book, as I suggested above. Of course, the focus has all along been medieval interpretation, not Virgil reception; nonetheless, shifting from interpretive to creative texts (I use the terms knowing full well that this "frontier" is also "unstable") changes matters. The emphasis now is primarily textual, not codicological, and the English connection - the Normans now lordling it over England -- is sounded infrequently (if tellingly, as on p. 210).

As Baswell characterizes her, the Dido of the *Eneas* belongs to a markedly (even with respect to the *Aeneid*) luxurious and mercantile Carthage. "It is...the line of this dangerous *desmesure*, commercial and erotic -- figured in the city, its queen, and its goddess -- that threatens both the imperial military thos of the aristocratic Trojans, and the marital fate of their leader." (193) When he comes to describe Pallas' tomb, sealed with bitumen, using one of Yunck's notes, Baswell reminds us that according to lore recorded by Isidore of Seville, bitumen can only be dissolved by menstrual blood. "The very learned obscurity of this reference, characteristically, hides from the unlearned the female power that it reveals, even while it acknowledges their politely unspeakable danger" (204). But there is even more going on here, for the power of menstrual blood over bitumen is recorded by natural historians describing the asphalt of the Dead Sea and in the late Latin poem *De Sodoma*. (For this see my article "The Metamorphosis of Sodom: The Ps-Cyprian *De Sodoma* as an Ovidian Episode," *Traditio* 44 [1988], 1-35, esp. 24-25, with reference to *De Sodoma*, v. 157, and reports in Pliny, Josephus [and "Hegesippus"], Tacitus, and Bede.) If readers know that tradition as well, the spectre of homosexuality and not mere "homosociality" may be buried then not only, as Baswell shows, beneath and behind the episode of Nisus and Euryalus and certain charges levelled against the poem's Aeneas, but with Pallas himself.

The sixth and final chapter is "Writing the reading of Virgil: Chaucerian authorities in the *House of Fame* and *The Legend of Good Women*." For Baswell (as for other readers), the earlier of these two Chaucerian texts poses a question of the entire Virgilian, indeed textual tradition that had accumulated through the fourteenth century: "In this welter of conflictingly pre-read Latin texts, vernacular versions, and free-standing mythography, where might a medieval reader locate an authentic voice of the classical poets...?" (221). Baswell's stronger claim is that "Geffrey [the narrator of *House of Fame*] not only occupies a double role, linking himself parodically to Aeneas in his quest and wanderings...and to the arguably heroic reader of the received *Aeneid*..., but that in his own wanderings Geffrey moves among the three major and conflicting approaches that were taken to the *Aeneid* in its medieval reception" (230). For example, "[t]he reductionist impact of some medieval glossating" emerges in "the narrator's...summary deflation of epic tone, his sometimes comically simple-minded didacticism..." (231).

We have come full circle to the pedagogical version -- and it is this kind of insight that does, in the end, unify Baswell's entire book -- though now in the parodic voice of Geffrey. With that in mind, I wonder if there is not an easier (but of course unprovable) solution to the old crux "hir yonge sone lulo,/and eke Ascanius also" (1.177-78). Since he sets one up to see it (232), I wonder that Baswell himself doesn't argue that Chaucer here is sending up a simple-minded reader (like Geffrey) who took a simple-minded gloss "Iulus id est Ascanius" to mean "Iulus et Ascanius."

With the arrival of the eagle and the ascent, Boethius, already an intertext for the *Aeneid* in early and high medieval allegorizing comment on the Roman epic, is also mixed into the parodic brew. Particularly helpful are Baswell's comparisons of the House of Twigs in *House of Fame* 3 to Sibyl's cave in both *Aeneid* 6 and 3 (242-3).

The reading of the "Legend of Dido" in *The Legend of Good Women* is equally sound, if less interesting in my view. I would only add that even as Baswell's confident narrator suppresses Virgilian detail in his account, it is available to reenter via the minds of the readers, setting up a debate between reader and narrator - "yes, but..."; "no, you've forgotten this..." -- that is much like the dialogism Ovid himself constructs nowhere more often than in the *Heroides*. For as Baswell's own book has so admirably shown, while "this very rewriting of the Virgilian Aeneas calmly presumes the Chaucerian narrator's right to create his own version of Troy..." (259), readers steeped in the multivalent tradition -- or, as Baswell himself describes it in his brief review of one episode from the *Faerie Queene*, the "hermeneutic polyphony of... inherited Virgilianisms" (283, from "Envoi, to the Renaissance: books of Aeneas and of Dido") -- these readers, I say, have rights and capacities to read as they list. And so they will.