**Ascanius in the Aeneid: Like father, like son**

Sometimes named Iulus, sometimes Ascanius, Aeneas’ son plays in the *Aeneid* a non-negligible role. Just as Aeneas somehow represents the mature Octavius¹, who had become Augustus, so one might say that Iulus-Ascanius reflects the young Octavius, commonly nicknamed *Puer* ("The Kid")². It would then be surprising that the son would escape the dreaded *cacoelgia latens* of which the father is the main target throughout the poem³. This is what we will try to check here.

During the tragic night of Troy, he was still a young child, and as such beyond satire, but we are not obliged to believe Aeneas when he claims that a supernatural flame had appeared around the face of his son, deciding the old Anchises to take the road to exile (2.681 ff.). We find him in Carthage seven years later (*septima... a estas*, 1.755-56), in his early teens, handsome like a god, but not just any god. Add wings to him, and you have Cupid before you; or conversely, remove his wings to Cupid, and you have before you Ascanius (1.689-90):

> et alas / *Exuit et gressu gaudens incedit Iuli.*

“This shedding his wings / he masquerades as Iulus, prancing with his stride.”⁴

In short, the two are interchangeable, and although Venus has promised that the substitution of person would last only one night (*noctem non amplius unam*, 1.683), just the

¹ And even, sometimes, Julius Caesar, as at 10.148 ff., parodying Caesar’s style.
² *Puer et Amor* are code names regularly used by Augustan poets to describe Octavian Augustus. For *Amor*, cf. for instance [http://www.virgilmurder.org/images/pdf/cynthia.pdf](http://www.virgilmurder.org/images/pdf/cynthia.pdf), p. 14. *Puer* was a nickname that clung to him, and he had the greatest difficulty to get rid of it, even by decree: *ne quis eum puerum dicet ne maiestas tanti imperii minueretur*, Serv. *ad Vg.*, Ecl. 1.42; cf. Cic. *Phil.* 3.3; 4.3; 13.24; *ad Fam.* 11.7.2; 12.25.4; Suet. *Aug.* 12.1.
³ Suet.-Don., *Vit. Verg.*, 44: *M. Vipsanius a Maecenate eum [Vergilium] suppositum appellabat nouae cacozeliae repertorem non tumidae nec exilis, sed ex communibus uerbis atque ideo latentis*, The standard translation (D. Wilson-Okamura) reads as follows: “Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa would complain that he was put under the yoke by Maecenas in order to invent a new kind of affectation, neither bombastic nor overly humble, but constructed of common words and therefore not obvious”, but it seems more likely that *cacoelgia latens* might rather refer to a kind of subversive double writing, and *communibus uerbis* to ambiguity: [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cacoelgie_latens](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cacoelgie_latens) and [http://www.virgilmurder.org/images/pdf/crypto.pdf](http://www.virgilmurder.org/images/pdf/crypto.pdf), pp. 5-7.
⁴ Translation by R. Fagles (2006). The Latin text gives the impression (despite 658: *faciem mutatus et ora*) that Cupid needed only to strip his wings off to look like Iulus. And even after becoming Iulus, he keeps his divine face: *mirantur Iulum, / Flagrantisque dei uoltus*, 709-10.
time necessary to sweep Dido along into the fatal illusion that will lead her to the pyre, the
reader will still be entitled to wonder in each appearance of Ascanius whether under this
human face there would not be something of the evil deity who had dispossessed him of
himself. In 10.132-38, for instance, he seems so sure of his own invulnerability that he
exposes himself to danger on the battlements of the camp, his head uncovered (caput...
detectus honestum, 133), in the middle of warriors armed from head to foot. And indeed,
Venus watches over him as if he were the apple of her eye: Venus... iustissima cura, 132.
Why had the boy discarded his helmet\(^5\), Virgil forgets to tell us, but instead, he lingers
complacently on the beauty of his hair (137-38):

\[\text{Fusos ceruix cui lactea crinis}\]

\[\text{Accipit et molli subnectens circulus auro.}\]

“Streaming hair on his milk-white neck has been gathered and ribboned
Into a circlet of soft, supple gold.”\(^6\)

And that, in the midst of battle preparations, when the besiegers are about to take over
the camp! But what can only be called derision, or cacozelia, does not stop there, for the poet
still spends three and a half lines to compare his character to... a jewel\(^7\), and as though it could
interest us to know, he even specifies that it may be either a gem studded in gold, or an ivory
set in boxwood or in terebinth wood! To capture the tone of this description, nothing is more
instructive than to compare it with the one made at 12.64-69 of Lavinia’s reddening cheeks,
similar, the poet says, either to ivory stained with blood-red purple, or to lilies mixed with
roses. As can be seen, the comparison in this case is perfectly suited, and not only the

\(^5\) The often used explanation is that Ascanius has been prohibited from fighting (cf. 9.656, 661-62): so for
instance Plessis-Lejay (Paris, 1911) and R. D. Williams (St Martins Press, 1973), after Servius. But then, what is
he doing there in the middle of fighters? “As the chief (or general)”, Servius replies (Intererat autem quasi dux);
Nisus and Euryalus even call him king (regem, 223)! According to S. J. Harrison, (Vergil Aeneid 10, Clarendon
Press, Oxford, 1991), ad loc., the young man is bareheaded in order to be recognized by the fighters he wants to
courage. But Virgil says nothing of the sort, he merely draws this maliciously flattering portrait. The same
commentator also notes that the use of the adjective honestus, 133 in a physical sense ( "of physical appearance")
falls within a familiar style ( "a colloquial touch"), certainly closer to Terence and Lucilius than to the epic style.

\(^6\) Translation by F. Ahl (2007).

\(^7\) Or perhaps it’s the boy’s head which is the object of the comparison, but anyway the repetition caput, 133 –
capiti, 135 is rather risible, since Ascanius’ head (or his person) is thus compared to a headdress, decus... capiti.
Is it why F. Ahl prefers to translate this capiti as “crown”? O. Sers (Paris, 2015) has “front”?
painter’s brush is more sober and delicate, but, most important, it’s not the girl herself who is the subject of comparison, but her blush: *talis virgo dabat ore colores*, 69, “those were the colors that appeared on her cheeks”.

Besides the physical resemblance, Ascanius shares another characteristic with the divine Cupid: he loves archery. We see him in the ninth book (v. 621 ff.) kill with one arrow the proud Numanus who parades in front of the lines. In fact, the feat is nothing very glorious, and Apollo does not fail to rebuke sharply the young prince for it. This episode is another nice case of *cacozelia latens*, and a great opportunity to take in the act a certain interpolator in his attempt to light a counterfire against the hidden threat of the anti-*Aeneid*.

It is the first time that the teenager kills a man, for “until then [he] had only been used to scaring fleeing beasts of quarry”, *ante feras solitus terrere fugacis* (v. 591), as the poet says in a tongue-in-cheek comment. And in fact, we have twice the opportunity to evaluate his hunting skills. The first occasion is in Carthage. Lines 4.156-59 show him prancing proudly on his horse, passing everybody, and complaining in himself that he has to deal with wild goats and deer, "despicable cattle", *pecora... inertia*, when he is burning with the desire of facing a foaming boar or - why not? - a lion:

> At puer Ascanius mediis in uallibus acri  
> Gaudet equo iamque hos cursu iam praeterit illos  
> Spumantemque dari pecora inter inertia uotis  
> Optat aprum aut fuluom descendere monte leonem.

Humor is obvious, but its real intention is not easy to capture. Critics usually are content to see in it something like an affectionate smile, and some have even persuaded themselves that this painting flatters the son of Aeneas: “Virgile veut rehausser le courage de cet enfant, ancêtre de la *gens Iulia*.” Yet one can perceive in those lines a dose of causticity that sits uneasily with conniving indulgence: so *dari* (= “to be served to him on a silver

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11 Servius does not show that he is sensitive to this humor: *et bene puerilem ostendit animum qui per mobilitatem frequenter optat timenda*.
platter”) or pecora... inertia, inflated with fool smugness (Montaigne, Essais, II, 2 had perfectly grasped the tone). It may even be that the conjunction *At* implies (in relation with *praeterit*) that the boy considers himself superior to all.

Of course, the Lucretian reminiscence contained in v. 154-55 has long been spotted by commentators, but it is not sufficient to say that in the two verses of De Rerum Natura (2.329-30) echoed by Virgil¹³, Lucretius describes military maneuvers in the Field of Mars: we have done nothing if we do not put back the passage in its context, namely a demonstration of the relativity of motion, with soldiers serving only to illustrate the idea of the vanity and emptiness of all things, viewed from above. Indeed, just as Lucretius uses *Et tamen* to reduce the proud legions to the state of “a bright spot in the plain” (v. 331), Virgil, to ridicule Ascanius, only needs *Interea*, 160 (“in the meantime”, “in the midst of this turmoil”), an adverb whose effectiveness was already proved at v. 67 to stress the helplessness of sacrifices to save Dido. The sky has rumbled, a cloud has burst: it needs no more to rout the dashing hunters, and all their crew. The dispersion is immediate and without glory: *passim*, 162, *diversa*, 163, *metu*, 164. Ascanius is of course the first of all to scamper away, and the bombastic periphrasis at v. 163:

Dardaniusque nepos Veneris

is all the more funny. Since antiquity, readers felt uneasy that Venus appears in the role of a grandmother¹⁴. But this unseemliness is part of the satire, as well as the accelerating effect of desperate flight, obtained by the caesura after Veneris and the enjambment (*diversa per agros / Tecta metu petiere*): “[how fast does he run, the grand-son of Venus! (it’s in the family to flee from danger)”]. Fear has changed sides. The recalling of *cursu*, 154 and *fuga*, 155 by *metu*, 164 ironically stresses the reversal of situation¹⁵. A half-line provides the final peak (v. 164):

ruont de montibus amnes.

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¹³ Compare Virgil’s lines (*Transmittunt cursu campos atque agmina cerui / Puluerulenta fuga glomerant montisque relinquunt*) to Lucretius’s ones: *Et circumvolitant equites, mediosque repente / Trammittunt ualido quatientes impete campos.*

¹⁴ *Quidem indecenter dictum uolunt ut Venus aua sit*, D.Servius.  
¹⁵ 4.159 (*descendere monte leones <> 164 (ruont de montibus amnes*), with, between, discreetly, this *metu*: about the braggart that nothing frightened, supposedly! That’s Virgil’s laughter.
Let’s put an explanatory colon (not a semicolon) before ruont. Why this stampede? “Rivers (neither boars nor lions!) rush down from the mountains.” Since montibus resumes the leitmotiv of the preceding description (saxi deiectae uertice, 152, Decurrere iugis, 153, montisque relinquont, 155 descendere monte, 159), it seems like, through those raging torrents, we hear the voice of the Mountain, troubled in its sacred peace by the profane and insolent invasion of the human animal\textsuperscript{16}.

Time has passed. After fleeing from Carthage as thieves\textsuperscript{17}, the Trojans finally reach Latium, their promised land, a land Aeneas has already conquered in his mind (fatis mihi debita tellus, 7.120, “land that is due to me by the Fates”). They are barely landed, and already the young Ascanius indulges in his favorite sport, hunting. Here he is roaming in the woods with his pack of dogs. When you thus launch out, weapons in hand, in an unknown country, you are exposed to many hazards. And the inevitable happened. Silvia, the daughter of Tyrrhus, chief herdsman of King Latinus, and officially responsible for the security of these places (late custodia credita campi, 7.486), had tamed a beautiful deer she passionately cherished.

The poet lingers with an obvious delight on the feeling that tied the girl to the animal (v. 483 ff.), so that when Ascanius pierces it with an arrow, the reader is prepared to sympathize as well with the suffering deer, whose moans are almost human (imploranti similis, 502), as with its young mistress whose rending cries are heard far and wide. And Virgil does not fail to pierce vengefully the cruel hunter with an arrow from Apollo's quiver, while slyly specifying at line 496 that by accomplishing this murderous act, the adolescent was “fired with a love of glory”\textsuperscript{18}:

\textit{Ipse etiam eximiae laudis succensus amore.}

The sibilant consonants united to the vocalic acuity chastise, as it were, the young fool, while \textit{Ipse etiam} puts him in line with his rabid dogs (rabidae, 493), and curuo… cornu (497) with the infernal Allecto (cornuque recuruo, 513). But the sharpest touch of irony perhaps lays in the gap between the laudatory epithet \textit{eximiae} and the laughable ease of shooting a tamed animal. And even so, he very nearly missed his target (dextrae erranti, 498,

\textsuperscript{16} This comment on 4.156-59 is an extract from the online anti-\textit{Enéide}.

\textsuperscript{17} Virgil compares them to laborious - and plundering - ants (4.401ff.).

\textsuperscript{18} Translation by R. Fagles.
"his faltering hand")\textsuperscript{19}, and it needed a god - which of them we are not told – to guide the arrow up to the stag\textsuperscript{20}.

The fault is very serious. As M. C. J. Putnam observes, the stag of Silvia is not only a kind of prefiguration of Turnus (\textit{forma praestanti}, 483 is echoed by \textit{praestanti corpore}, 783), whom 12.749-55, moreover, explicitly compares to a stag at bay, it also somehow symbolizes Italy itself at the time the Trojans discover it\textsuperscript{21}. Like father, like son\textsuperscript{22}. Dido too, we recall, was compared to a doe wounded by a treacherous archer (4.69-73), and through the Queen of Carthage, Carthage itself was embodied\textsuperscript{23}.

As the saying goes, valour does not await the passing of years. When the Trojan women, shamefully relegated out of the games given in honor of the deceased Anchises, undertake to burn the ships, it is Ascanius who first rushes to bring these rebels back on line.

\textsuperscript{19}A. Mandelbaum. J. Henry (\textit{Aeneidea}, Dublin, 1873-92) proposes “going wrong”.

\textsuperscript{20}Although \textit{Ipse etiam} can be understood at a “flat” level in relation to the mad dogs, it is obvious that his avowable object is to line up the young man on other people baying for glory, first Latinus (cf. especially v. 98-99, 231-32, 271-72), whose ambition will cause the misfortune of his people: “the deluded and deluding nature of the search for fame and glory is revealed with clarity and definition”, writes A. J. Boyle, “The meaning of the \textit{Aeneid}. A critical inquiry…”, \textit{Ramus} I (1972), p. 135, about the parenthesis \textit{si qua est ea gloria} at 7.4.


\textsuperscript{22}R.O.A.M. Lyne, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 200 clearly sees it: “Like his father, Ascanius as a hunter turns out to be disastrous for other people.” But it’s to be cheaply reassured to think that the poet carries no condemnation upon these evil agents: “nothing personally critical”; similarly, J. Griffin, \textit{Latin Poets and Roman Life}, Chapel Hill, 1986, pp. 170-72 (“But that is the effect of the Trojan destiny: to cause suffering without willing it, to cause the destruction of so many beautiful things.”); R. J. Starr, “Silvia’s Deer…”, \textit{AJP} 113 (1992), p. 439: “Ascanius… unintentionally causes great pain, as do Aeneas and the Trojans.” Yet Ascanius had no right to hunt on this land, and Aeneas should have primarily gone to meet Latinus, who had put this condition for the conclusion of a treaty of peace (v. 266).

\textsuperscript{23}This comment on Silvia’s stag is taken, with little changes, from pp. 241-43 of “Pour une juste guerre? Réflexions sur le septième livre de l’\textit{Enéide}”, an article published in 1995 in \textit{LEC}, pp. 225-48.
But when he throws them his impudent *Quis furor iste nouos?* (670) – he, a teenage, to *matres* (654), as to children caught in the act ("what yet this madness!") - he just forgets that their anger was not born of nothing, but stemmed from the madness of his own father, who had seen fit to cut women from the life of the community. Virgil expresses his disapproval in a fun way by letting his readers, for a moment, wonder if this *Quis furor* would not constitute a personal aside about the excited youth. What a fool he is, indeed, to suddenly spur his horse and rush out of the *lusus Troiae* in which he was participating, to the dismay of his trainers (*nec exanimes possunt retinere magistri*, 669), a detail that recalls the Ganymede woven on the cloak Aeneas offered to Cloanthus (5.254-57: *acer* (cf. 668) *anhelanti similis*; *Longaeui palmas nequiquam ad sidera tendunt / Custodes*).

Ascanius was convinced that his mere appearance would calm minds (emphasis on *Ascanius*, 673). But those “foolish” women no longer recognize “their” Ascanius (*ego uester / Ascanius*, 672-73). Is it his helmet that scares them? In a dramatic gesture, he throws it, *inanem*, on the ground. Editors vainly try to cleanse this *inanem* from any unpleasant implication for the dear boy24. For his part, Peerlkamp judged this adjective impossible, and replaced it with a harmless *ahenam*. But why not understand that this helmet (i.e. the owner: hypallage) is simply “stupid”, an appreciation that serves as a Vergilian postscript to the chapter on the *lusus Troiae* such as Julius Caesar had renovated it (*lusus inanis*)?

One thing is certain, Octavius’ image is severely damaged through the character of this *puer* giving orders to adults, this "Ganymede" (cf. *Delicias domini, Ecl. 2.2*) admonishing mothers, this foolish boy claiming the role of providential savior and charismatic leader25.

Arrogant with women, our young prodigy also proves able to teach men, whatever their age. The scene takes place in the Trojan camp besieged by Turnus (Book 9). The situation is critical, the leaders know they cannot last long in the absence of Aeneas gone for reinforcements. He must be urgently warned, but how? At that moment, two young men burst into the council. They are called Nisus and Euryalus, and just offer themselves as volunteers to try to cross the enemy lines and carry the message. The relief is great, the two heroes are warmly congratulated and praised to the skies. Tears in his eyes, the old Aletes, “bowed with

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24 See the involuntary drollery of the Servian comment: *concauam, uacuam sine capite.*

25 On the episode as a whole, cf. the online anti-*Enéide, ad loc.*
the years, a seasoned adviser”, *annis grauis atque animi maturus Aletes* (v. 246)\(^{26}\), grasps them, hugs their shoulders, and encourages them with all his heart, assuring them that neither Aeneas nor Ascanius will forget their bravery. But he particularly does not want to insult them by believing they could be motivated by material rewards, because, as he says, virtue is in itself its greatest reward.

Ascanius obviously does not think so, and he indicates it by an irrepressible *Immo ego uos*, 257, of which it would be wrong to underestimate the virulence by interpreting it as an endorsement (“No, indeed, I shall never forget it”)\(^{27}\), rather than a condemnation: “Oh no! Your rhetoric is just nonsense.” And he immediately accumulate the most fabulous promises. It would be one thing that he offers two cups of exquisite silver, two tripods, two great talents of gold, an antique crater, but he even goes so far as to donate to Nisus Turnus’ own horse (admittedly, it is not yet seized, but it’s as if it were, *iam nunc tua praemia, Nise*, 271). And it’s not enough, for the boy is sure that his father will add twelve women of the best choice\(^{28}\), as many male captives with all their weapons, and “in addition” (*insuper his*), all the royal domain possessed by Latinus\(^{29}\). What a prodigality, and what a good way to stimulate the courage of a man whose sole motivation, quite sufficient, was initially to distinguish himself with a great achievement (*aliquid… magnum*, 186)! Decidedly, Ascanius is a great psychologist...

But let us turn to Euryalus. Ascanius sees him as his like, his double, and he even gives him the extravagant title of "venerable child" (*uenerande puer*, 276), which properly

\(^{26}\) Translation by R. Fagles.

\(^{27}\) See for instance P. Hardie (« Virgil Aeneid Book IX », Cambridge, 1994), *ad loc.*: “immo, ‘indeed’, putting detail on Aletes’ hint.” For J. Delille (translation in French of the *Aeneid*, Paris, 1804), “Ces mots par lesquels commence le discours d’Iule, *immo ego uos*, marquent bien l’impatience qu’il a d’exprimer sa reconnaissance aux deux jeunes guerriers.” It seems actually that the implication of lines 254-56 (*Tum cetera reddet / Actutum pius Aeneas atque integer aeui / Ascanius*) has escaped many scholars, who have not seen that under a nice understatement, old Aletes puts Ascanius at his true place, that of a minor (*integer aeui*: literally, he has a whole life ahead of him), compared to his father, the sole holder of authority, who, as such, is the sole person entitled to reward *actutum*, “at once” (R. Fagles). It is against this unpleasant truth that the teenager protests by insolently assuming the paternal prerogatives (rewarding *actutum*).

\(^{28}\) Latin is more explicit (with its highlighted *corpora*: *lectissima matrum / Corpora* (“a dozen top-quality female / Bodies”, F. Ahl). From a teenager!

\(^{29}\) *Insuper his campi quod rex habet ipse Latinus*, 274 (transl. W. F. Jackson Knight 1956).
suit only people of a venerable old age\textsuperscript{30}. He agrees to make him in the future his friend and confidant, adding that in the event of misfortune he would report on \textit{“his mother and family”}\textsuperscript{31} all these beautiful promises (v. 301-2):

\begin{quote}
\textit{Quae tibi polliceor reduci rebusque secundis,}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textit{Haec eadem matrice tuae generique manebunt.}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
“All that I promise to you if you come back, your mission successful,
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
These same things will remain as my pledge to your mother and family.”\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

This is somewhat surprising (see J. Perret, 1980, \textit{ad loc.}). First, the mother of Euryalus is a widow, and he is her only child: \textit{generi}, “your family”, is therefore quite hollow, as \textit{Haec eadem}, since it’s hard to see how that poor woman could become the friend and confidant of Ascanius in place of her deceased son! This kind of empty promises unpleasantly reminds those made to Dido by Aeneas when he met her for the first time: \textit{Semper honos nomenque tuom laudesque manebunt} (1.609). The echo of \textit{manebunt} is still enriched with a reference to the first eclogue (\textit{Fortunate senex, ergo tua rura manebunt}, 46), where a sarcastic Meliboeus congratulates Tityrus that his field "will remain", that is to say it will not fly, it will just no more be his property\textsuperscript{32}!

Again, critics display any indulgence and leniency towards Aeneas’ son. For example, they perfectly see that by offering in advance to Nisus the horse of Turnus, the presumptuous boy dangerously exposes himself to the same ridicule as Dolon in the \textit{Iliad} (II. 10.299 ff.), but

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{30} See R. D. Williams, \textit{op. cit.} P. Hardie, \textit{op. cit.}, who aptly notes the echo to \textit{Culex} 25-26 (\textit{Octavi uenerande... sancte puer}: the true author of this poem, i.e. Octavius, took certainly pleasure in this parody), adds that the phrase is “bordering on oxymoron”. And morally either, Euryalus has nothing "venerable". He will quickly prove as fierce as greedy (and he will pay the price). But already we can realize, despite his protestations of disinterest (v. 199-200), that his intentions are not pure. And to enter the old debate between \textit{Virtus} and \textit{Fortuna} (12. 435-36: \url{http://www.virgilmurder.org/images/pdf/vgcontrengl.pdf}), his statement at v. 281-83 shows that, despite appearances, he is like Aeneas on the side of \textit{Fortuna}, for he pledges that he will never be untrue to himself, “granted only that fortune fall in our favour, not adversely” (W. F. Jackson Knight), \textit{tantum Fortuna secunda / Haud aduersa cadat}. But this thought has so shocked some editors that, despite the platitude, they replace \textit{Haud} with \textit{Aut} (so for instance A. Bellessort 1936, J. Perret 1980, P. Heuzé 2015, etc.).

\textsuperscript{31} Translation by F. Ahl.

\end{footnotesize}
whereas Dolon arouses frank mockery, Ascanius brings forth a sympathetic and even affectionate smile. They carefully avoid addressing the vulgarity of language at line 298 (Euryalus designated as “such delivery”, *talem... partum*!), or the unfathomable conceit betrayed by line 300 (“I swear on my own head, as my father used to do”). Anyway, they find him every excuse on the ground of his youth and his emotional stress. But it could well be that Virgil himself thinks differently, for, when, a little later in the poem, he has these scathing words against the Homeric Dolon (12. 351-52):

*Illum Tydides alio pro talibus ausis*

*Adfecit pretio nec equis aspirat Achillis.*

“Tydeus’ son, Diomedes, rewarded his daring with different

Payment, however. He no longer dreams of Achilles’ fine horses.”

there is no reason why the lesson would not apply as well to Ascanius, and even more so, as it is shocking to see a boy barely out of childhood already appropriating in thoughts the mount of a hero like the great Turnus.

But let us hear the end of the episode. The moment of departure has arrived. Ascanius tearfully (*in lacrimans*, 303) gives Euryalus a valuable sword (*Auratum*, 304; *eburna*, 305), taken, we presume, from the booty made by the Trojans during their Cretan sojourn (*Gnosius*, 305). The two young men are accompanied to the gates, and, of course, “the beautiful Iulus” wants to draw attention at himself (v. 310-12):

*Nec non et pulcher Iulus,*

*Ante annos animumque gerens curamque virilem,*

*Multa patri mandata dabat portanda.*

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33 So J. Delille considers that the promise of Ascanius “a quelque chose de plus naïf et de plus attachant”.

34 Cf. R. D. Williams *ad* v. 276: “Throughout this speech of Ascanius Virgil aims to convey an impression of youthful sentiment and ingenuousness.”

35 Translation by F. Ahl.

“Yet first the handsome Iulus – beyond his years,

filled with a man’s courage, a man’s concerns as well –

gives them many messages to carry to his father.”37

The cacozelic intention is betrayed by several signs. First, that the grand-son of Venus is a beautiful boy we already knew, but the time is rather poorly chosen to mention it again. Secondly, the heavy Nec non et is perhaps too readily neutralized38, since it could hold a shade such as “he could not keep from acting up”.

As for the line 311, there is no denying that it is double-edged: apparently laudatory, it may conceal a criticism of this overweening youth, whose behavior is strangely reminiscent of a certain Octavius, who, when he was less than twenty years old, had pretended to dictate his law to the Roman Senate, forcing it to name him consul. The poet’s irony is even noticeable through the sounds of verse 312, Multa patri mandata dabat portanda, [tatatata], preparing to the following line, where the breezes scatter all Ascanius’ messages, and “make of them an ineffectual gift to the clouds”! (v. 312-13):

Sed aurae / Omnia discerpunt et nubibus inrita donant39.

Ascanius will make a last appearance in the twelfth book (v. 432 ff.), in a scene that brings father and son together for a fake farewell intended to be pathetic, while it laughably parodies Hector’s sublime farewell in the Iliad40. Admittedly, Ascanius is not here the poet’s principal target, but that Virgil includes him within his sovereign contempt, it is what a careful reading of the Aeneid renders little doubtful.

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37 Translation by R. Fagles.
38 “And for his part”, W. F. Jackson Knight; “as does the handsome Iulus”, A. Mandelbaum; “Lovely Iulus came too”, F. Ahl.
39 Translation by W. F. Jackson Knight.