Virgil against Aeneas: an impalpable irony (Aen. 12.311-23, 383-499)

The problem with hypocrisy is that, if carried far enough, it becomes almost impossible to uncover. How many perfect impostors died peacefully in their beds, without ever having had to render account to anyone, surrounded by general consideration, and bestowed upon with honors! Only in fiction Tartuffe is eventually unmasked, but in real life, the likes of him thrive and take the upper hand. Since nothing is more like a true devotee than a false devotee, Molière’s comedy could not but cast aspersions on religion itself, so that the insolent poet was rapidly facing a formidable opposition.

But speaking of devotion, how could a reader of the Aeneid avoid questioning the sincerity of another famous devotee, the pious man par excellence, Aeneas, son of Anchises and Venus? Many yet feel exempted from this task by Virgil himself\(^1\), who never misses an opportunity, throughout the poem, to refer to the piety of his hero, termed *pius* on no less than twenty occasions\(^2\). But the phrase *Pius Aeneas* has everything of an automatism, to the point that even Aeneas uses it to present himself before his divine mother disguised as a young huntress: *Sum pius Aeneas*, “I am Aeneas the Righteous” (1.378)\(^3\). Such is the name by which he “modestly” claims to be "known beyond the heavens" (*fama super aethera notus*, 379), such is his alleged identity, but perhaps not his reality, since, by the very proclamation of his own virtue (for the Roman *pietas* has a much wider scope than the English "piety"), he is contradicting it.

One could therefore reasonably surmise that, each time Virgil uses this phrase plucked from the lips of his hero, he somehow encloses it in implicit quotation marks (“the self-

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\(^2\) 1.220, 305, 378; 4.393; 5.26, 286, 418, 685; 6.9, 176, 232; 7.5; 8.84; 9.255; 10.591, 783, 826; 11.170; 12.175, 311. Added to this are several allusions to his piety: 1.10, 545; 3.42, 480; 6.403, 405, 688; 11.292: cf. the entry “‘Pietas’” in the *Virgil Encyclopedia* (quoting also, but wrongly, 6. 769, which concerns Silvius Aeneas). See too R. G. Austin, *Aeneidos Liber Quartus*, Oxford, 1955, *ad* IV, 393.

\(^3\) Translation by F. Ahl (2007).
proclaimed pious Aeneas”, “the alleged pious Aeneas”)
. A good indication of this is that the poet occasionally enjoys using the expression against the grain, as at 4.393, where Aeneas reacts so coldly to the passionate complaints of Dido, or at 10.591, when he mocks Lucagus he has just hurt to death, or again at 10.826, when, addressing the young Lausus he has literally impaled, he still dares to boast of his piety!

That the poet has twice anticipated Aeneas’ self-qualification, thus seeming to take it on his own (1.220, 305), is not really an obstacle. In the first case, the "piety" of the Trojan is little more than compliance with the customs of mourning (and the expression Praecipue pius Aeneas will be reproduced unchanged at 6.176, in similar circumstances); as for the second case, it is purely formal, unless you believe that reflecting on what you will do tomorrow is an act of piety. Moreover, even apart from Aeneas’ self-qualification, and long before the composition of the Aeneid, his piety, real or imagined, was integral to his legend, as Diomedes recalls at 11.292, and as Virgil himself states at the beginning of his poem in the famous lines where he wonders why the Queen of Heaven is persecuting a man “so famous for his devotion”, insignem pietate uirum (1.8-11).

But before taking at face value that flattering characterization of the hero, and so condemning without trial Juno and all the heavenly powers, the doxa should think twice. After all, Virgil does not affirm, he asks a question:

Tantaene animis caelestibus irae?

“Can such rage inflame the immortals’ hearts?”

and the answer will depend on the result of our reading: either Aeneas actually deserves our admiration, which makes Juno a monster of injustice, or his virtue is an illusion, and he is the

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4 It is interesting in this regard to observe that the first translator of the (whole) Aeneid in Russian, V. Petrov, understood the expression pious Aeneas in the sense of “renowned for his piety”, without any certitude about the veracity of the qualifying adjective: cf. the entry “Petrov” in the Virgil Encyclopedia.

5 In addition, he attacked him treacherously in the back while he protected the retreat of his wounded father: http://www.virgilmurder.org/images/pdf/turnus.pdf, pp. 11-14.


7 R. Fagles.
monster⁸. In other words, far from established from the start as a certainty, Aeneas’ *pietas* is given instead as an enigma and a challenge. Will we meet this challenge?

As a test and exercise, and in order not to go beyond the limits of a simple article, we will examine here a passage from the twelfth and final book of the *Aeneid*, which, despite a parenthesis dedicated to the warlike exploits of Turnus (v. 324-82), forms a coherent whole centered around the wound inflicted to Aeneas (v. 311-467), and which is introduced by a conspicuous *pius Aeneas*, 311. To put it broadly, Trojans and Latins were about to conclude a treaty under which the two leaders would duel to decide the fate of the war, when the fighting had suddenly resumed between the two armies. Aeneas strives to calm spirits, but he vainly admonishes his people, no one is listening, and he even receives a spear in his thigh⁹. We then assist to the useless efforts of his personal physician to remove the tip, to his miraculous healing by Venus, and to his solemn farewell to his son. Finally, boiling with fury, he rushes out of the camp, with nothing else in mind than confronting Turnus, until a javelin touches the crest of his helmet, which puts him in a rage.

We will follow one by one these three stages.

**-Part 1 (v. 311-23)**

Unarmed and bareheaded, Aeneas raises his hand to heaven to demand the cessation of fighting¹⁰. So, he prefers to expose himself to danger rather than participate in the violation of a treaty. Isn’t that admirable? Undoubtedly the appearances plead for him, but there is a problem, for, when he claims that the truce is already set (*Ictum iam foedus*, 314), he forgets that the augur Tolumnius had interrupted with a javelin throw the ratification process¹¹, as

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⁹ The thigh, probably, but Virgil does not really specifies. M. Griffith, (“What does Aeneas look like?”, *CP* 80 (1985), 309-19) compares Homer, in particular *Iliad*, 4.105-213 and 11.504-15, showing that “the contrast is absolute”, since the Greek poet, on the contrary, spares us no detail.

¹⁰ We will find him later (v. 579-82) in the same attitude, and just as “pious” (*Aeneas ... / Testaturque deos*, “he calls the gods to witness”), but he will be delivering a savage ultimatum to the enemy city: if it does not surrender, he will reduce it to ashes and kill all its inhabitants...

explicitly stated in verse 286, *infecto foedere*, "the mangled treaty"\(^\text{12}\), and already implied in 242-43 (*foedusque precantur / Infectum*, "[the Latins] pray that the pact be dashed"\(^\text{13}\)).

Moreover, Aeneas perfectly knows that, since, without fear of contradiction, he adds, but in a somewhat cryptic way (v. 316-17):

\[
\textit{ego foedera faxo / Firma manu, Turnum debent haec iam mihi sacra.}
\]

Let’s compare four translations\(^\text{14}\):

"It is I who must confirm the compact which has been made, and it was to me alone that Turnus was promised at the ritual sacrifice."

"With my right arm / I shall maintain our treaty. Sacred rites / make Turnus mine."

"This strong right arm will put our truce to the proof. / Our rites have already made the life of Turnus mine."

"My hand will / Forge guarantees for this treaty whose terms swear Turnus is my due!"

First observation, the interpreters tend to weaken the phrase *firma facere*,\(^\text{15}\) which is the equivalent of the verb *firmare*, used at v. 212 (*firmabant foedera*) in the sense of “to seal”\(^\text{16}\), but conjugated in the imperfect, to indicate that the action was still in process (and would be eventually interrupted). By so doing, they seem to have feared to admit that the treaty had not been duly concluded.

Our second observation concerns the word *sacra*, that W. F. Jackson Knight translates by “sacrifice”\(^\text{17}\), as suggested and even demanded by the context, while A. Mandelbaum and

\(^{12}\) “the treaty was void”, W. F. Jackson Knight (1956); “the broken treaty”, A. Mandelbaum (1961); “shattered pact of peace”, R. Fagles; “the treaties are mangled”, F. Ahl.

\(^{13}\) R. Fagles. But here again, the interpretations diverge: "ardently wishing that the compact had never be made”, W. F. Jackson Knight; “pray the pact can be unmade”, A. Mandelbaum; “pray the treaty / Won’t work out”, F. Ahl. R. Tarrant, *Virgil Aeneid Book XII* (Cambridge, 2012), *ad loc.* has “they pray for the annulment of the treaty”.

\(^{14}\) In order: W. F. Jackson Knight, A. Mandelbaum, R. Fagles, F. Ahl.

\(^{15}\) The verb “confirm” (Jackson Knight) is equivocal, since it can either mean that the treaty had not been ratified, or that it had just to be “maintained” (Mandelbaum).

\(^{16}\) So R. Fagles; “ratified”, W. F. Jackson Knight; “swore”, A. Mandelbaum.


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R. Fagles attenuate it in “rites”, and F. Ahl curiously replaces it by “terms”. And it is true that the importance given to these sacra by the Latin phrase cannot be justified a priori, except if we recognize the secret link between the two sentence parts. By promising to seal the treaty in the blood of Turnus (foedera faxo / Firma manu), Aeneas turns his opponent into a sacrificial victim, an idea that is explicit in the second member: “the sacra have a debt to settle”, that is to say, they remained incomplete (or unfulfilled: see addendum at the end of this article). A victim is missing: Turnus. And one must not overlook the importance of the adverb iam here intimately associated to the pronoun mihi, the implication being that, as the priests have not been able to accomplish their task, Aeneas will now replace them as a priest (cf. Immolat, 949). Since the tenth book (v. 517-20), we knew that he has a disturbing penchant for human sacrifices 18.

Of course, Virgil had to hide this darker side of his character, and he did it masterfully. To the hasty reader, Aeneas will appear both pathetic (he tends his unarmed hand, but nobody listens to his words of peace) and heroic (he is dedicated to the common good up to risking his life). But to the more circumspect reader, he gradually, and more and more clearly, reveals himself at once odious and grotesque: a narcissistic monster (mihi... soli... me... ego... mihi) 19, yes, a soul thirsty of hatred and personal revenge against an opponent who simply defends his country and his honor, but also a ridiculous braggart: Me sinite atque auferte metus, "Let me [do] and do not be afraid".

Apparently animated by a disinterested love for peace, he is in reality motivated by his resentment of being stripped from a victory which would at last allow him to impose his law on the land he has invaded. As he stamps with anger, crying out and requiring everyone to give him the place, he looks like a spoiled child out whose hands you have ripped his favorite

18 This interpretation of v. 317 will find a striking confirmation at v. 694-95, when, to save the city from the destruction promised by Aeneas, Turnus declares himself ready to accept the duel (me uerius unum / Pro uobis foedus luere et decernere ferro). Scholars often fail to understand the meaning of foedus luere ("expiate the treaty"? "redeem the treaty"? Should ruptum be implied with foedus?). But if we understand luere in its ordinary meaning of "paying a debt," we see that it responds to debent, 317. Turnus takes up the challenge issued by Aeneas: he is willing to be a sacrificial victim, but with his sword in hand; he is ready to die, but also ready to win.

19 The second mihi also receives particular emphasis by its position in the fifth foot, as noticed by R. D. Williams (The Aeneid of Virgil, St Martins Press, 1973): “emphasis is put on mihi by the clash of ictus and accent in the fifth foot.”
toy\textsuperscript{20}. Virgil is scoffing, as shows his insistence at line 318: *Has inter uoces, media inter talia uerba*\textsuperscript{21}, and he takes pleasure in shooting at his ‘‘hero’’ a nice and good arrow, “sliding on its wings”, *alis alaplsa*, whose sender, *casusne deusne*, will forever remain anonymous, and for good reason! It is noteworthy that the poet does not skimp on the admiring expressions concerning this masterstroke: *tantam... laudem*, “so great an honor”, 321; *insignis gloria*, “an extraordinary glory”, 322. Of course these praises represent the enemy’s point of view, but there is no evidence that the author of the *Aeneid* does not share them... especially if he is also the secret author of that exploit.

**Part 2 (v. 383-440)**

At this point of the story, the poet slips away on tiptoe, and leaving to his fate his façade hero, he turns his attention to his heart hero, the proud Turnus, who multiplies the exploits on the battlefield. A great time (v. 324-82). But the action must proceed, and the will of Jupiter be fulfilled. Now we go into the Trojan camp, just in time to assist to the arrival of the wounded Aeneas, limping and leaning on his lieutenants for support, bloody (*cruentum*, 385), and with that cursed arrowhead deeply set into his flesh. But what a man! Does he moan? No, he enrages (*Saeuit*, 387), he gets carried away, he demands that the wound be opened as fast as possible and the foreign object removed, so that he can return immediately into battle. This time, shall we dare question his fortitude and doubt his value? Perhaps.

Since the verb *Saeuit*, highlighted by its position, sets the tone for the passage and summarizes the character's state of mind, it is important to stress its negative, and so to speak evil, connotation, in association with the adjective *saeuos* which, announced at 11.910, returns repeatedly through this twelfth book to characterize either Aeneas, directly or indirectly (107,

\textsuperscript{20} His attitude is perfectly irrational since, after the resumption of fighting, the Trojans (*suos*, 312) have no other choice but to defend themselves. Unfortunately, the doxa, being unable to consider the idea of a secret hostility of Virgil towards his hero, the doxa tends to attack the poet, accusing him of overdoing it: cf. R. Tarrant, *Virgil Aeneid Book XII*, Cambridge, 2012, *ad loc.*: “Virgil may be so determined to show Aeneas as committed to *ius* and *lex* that he risks having him seem naive or slow-witted (or, as Gaston Boissier more diplomatically said of him, ‘il pousse jusqu’à l’excès le respect de la foi jurée.’”).

\textsuperscript{21} “Just in the midst of these outcries, in the midst of such words”. *Talis* is most often pejorative with Virgil (see the online anti-*Aeneid*, N. 45 of the first book), and, in fact, these words are inconsistent, since, as observed above, they say at once that the treaty was concluded and that it was not (cf. also the previous note).
498, 888, 890, 945\textsuperscript{22}, or Jupiter, his patron, but Jupiter as a ruthless executioner flanked by his two Furies (849), or, for comparison with one of the Furies, the deadly poison which arms the Parthians (857). In only one case (629), the term applies to Turnus, or more precisely to the terrible losses he inflicts on the enemy; yet, as Juturna argues, this carnage is somewhat justified by the fact that Turnus is thus responding to Aeneas’ attacks (\textit{Et nos, "We as well")\textsuperscript{23}.

So, we should not be mistaken about the motives of the Trojan chief. If he is so eager to return to combat (where, let’s remember, he risks nothing serious under the shelter of his supernatural weapons), it is not by bravery, but because he is spurred by rage, the rage of an individual who considers himself so far above the common humanity\textsuperscript{24} that he does not accept that someone has dared to make attempt on his physical integrity. This reason now adds to his spite of having been deprived in extremis of a duel that he felt sure of winning thanks to the superiority of the arms specially forged for him by Vulcan. That is why he even more enranges, infuriates and growls with impatience, \textit{acerba fremens}, 398\textsuperscript{25}.

But this inner turmoil is going to break against the impotence of Iapyx, a good practitioner yet, on whom Apollo himself had bestowed the art of medicine (v. 391-97). Probably terrified (\textit{trepidat}, 403) by the demands of his master, whose imperious orders admit of no reply (v. 387-90), the old man (\textit{senior}, 401; \textit{longaeuos}, 420) tries as hard as he can to extract the iron from the wound, but he comes to nothing. The poet maliciously emphasizes the almost haphazard stubbornness of the surgeon (\textit{trepidat}, 403 says a lot: "he struggling, rushes" or even "trembles"), as well as the vanity of his efforts (\textit{Nequiquam… nequiquam}, 403; \textit{Nulla… nihil}, 405).

It naturally arises from this contrast a secret irony to which the traditional reader, even if it crosses the threshold of his subconscious, cannot help but to resist, for he is paralyzed by the fear of making fun of Virgil by making fun of Aeneas. Besides, doesn’t the Trojan leader present the pure image of stoicism, when he is described \textit{lacrimis immobilis} (v. 400),

\textsuperscript{22} The phrase \textit{saeui… doloris} is perhaps better understood as “vengeful bitterness” (Jackson Knight) than as “savage pain” (Ahl) or “savage grief” (Williams, Fagles).

\textsuperscript{23} At 406, \textit{saeuos… horror}, “the ruthless horror” is seen from the Trojan perspective: literally, \textit{horror} means that their hair rise like bristles on the back of their necks.

\textsuperscript{24} Cf. 10. 29-30, 639, 880; and in this twelfth book, Aeneas is virtually on the way of “jupiterisation” (\textit{Indigeten Aenean}, 794); see \textit{Iuppiter hac stat}, 565, \textit{intonat}, 700, \textit{fulmine}, 922.

\textsuperscript{25} “bitterly cursing”, F.Ahl.
“insensitive to tears”? But this would require that the expression means that the pain snatches his tears without shaking him, whereas it refers to maerentis luli at the preceding verse, so that it’s rather his son’s tears which leave him unmoved. Moreover, it would be a little incongruous to commiserate with a person against whom the god of medicine himself, the bright Phoebus Apollo, harbours a deep-rooted hatred, to the point of refusing him his assistance (nihil auctor Apollo / Subuenit, 405-6). No matter, Mom is taking care. Literally outraged that her beloved offspring may suffer like anyone (Venus indigno nati concussa dolore... genetrix, 411-12), Venus descends straight from heaven to rescue him. It’s quickly achieved: a pinch of balm, a hint of ambrosia, not to mention the fragrant panacea. In a flash, Aeneas is back on his feet. One word, an adverb, quippe, ambushed at the corner of verse 422, is sufficient for the poet to insinuate irony:

Subitoque omnis de corpore fugit

Quippe omnis dolor, omnis stetit imo uolnere sanguis.

But many translators apparently sidestep this important nuance, like R. Fagles for instance:

“and / suddenly all the pain dissolved from Aeneas’ body…”

The ironic intention is yet little doubtful, since, after the powerful cocktail concocted by the goddess, it’s hard to see how the lucky Aeneas would not have been instantly healed! Quippe (“That goes without saying”) points to this evidence, and this derisory ease. More than once in the Aeneid, Virgil exploits this potential of quippe (close to a scilicet), as in 1.39 (quippe uetor fatis), on the lips of an almost sarcastic Juno (“For sure, the fates prevent me”), or 1.661 (Quippe domum timet ambiguam Tyriosque bilinguis), to emphasize the bad faith of Venus covering her crime against Dido under the pretext of the latter’s imaginary duplicity.

Thus, protected in all circumstances by his divine mother, Aeneas is almost beyond human condition. He is a lucky man, favored by Fortune, to which he is virtually equated at

27 Likewise W. F. Jackson Knight: “And suddenly all the pain that Aeneas had felt vanished”; A. Mandelbaum: “And suddenly all pain fled from his body”; R. Tarrant: “truly, really”. R. D. Williams has this comment on quippe: “emphasizing the fact that the apparently impossible did indeed happen.” Others well grasped the irony, so M. Rat [supra N. 17]: “comme il fallait s’y attendre”.

8
lines 677 and 694. Therefore, we can only be startled when we hear him a little further present himself as a model of virtue, and an unlucky man (435-36):

Disce, puer, uirtutem ex me uerumque laborem, 

Fortunam ex aliis.

“Learn from me, lad, what courage involves and the meaning of effort.

Others can teach you of Fortune.”

The child in question is his young son Ascanius, whom he holds tightly hugged against his armor, touching him with a kiss through his helmet’s visor (433-34):

Ascanium fusis circum complectitur armis

Summaque per galeam delibans oscula...

“he clasps Ascanius fast in an iron-clad embrace

and kissing him lightly through his visor…”

Per galeam, “through his helmet”: this is not perhaps what is most convenient to give a kiss! Bristling with his guttural sounds, the verse 433 gives a good idea of the harshness of the contact. Cacozelia is not far in this description, especially when compared to the famous farewell scene in the sixth book of the Iliad (v. 466 ff.). “So saying, glorious Hector stretched out his arms to his boy, but back into the bosom of his fair-girdled nurse shrank the child crying, affrighted at the aspect of his dear father, and seized with dread of the bronze and the crest of horse-hair, as he marked it waving dreadfully from the topmost helm. Aloud then laughed his dear father and queenly mother; and forthwith glorious Hector took the helm from


29 F. Ahl. Aeneas, who certainly has no intention to die, dares to compare himself to Sophocles’ Ajax (Ajax, 550-51), who commits suicide by a sense of honor, or to Euripides’ Alcestis (Alc., 182) who sacrifices her life to save that of her husband! But the unbearable irony is that he somehow steals this poignant phrase from Dido, a second Alcestis in this case (compare Alc., 177 ff. with Aen. 4. 651 ff.).

30 R. Fagles.
his head and laid it all-gleaming upon the ground. But he kissed his dear son, and fondled him in his arms…”\(^{31}\) Such a comparison is catastrophic for Vergil’s reputation, exposing him to the risk of being relegated without further ado to the unenviable status of "Homer’s moon"\(^{32}\), just because we do not care to wonder about his true intentions. Irony does not declare itself, you have to feel it.

But let’s be indulgent to “pious Aeneas”. So ardent is his thirst for battle, *audidus pugnae*, 430, so unbearable for him is the least delay (*oditque moras*, 431, “he hates delays”), that he simply does not take the time to remove his helmet. And too bad for Ascanius’ soft cheeks!

- **Part 3 (v. 441-67)**

Finally, accompanied by all his people (*omnis ... / Turba*, 443-44), Aeneas can propel himself out of the camp. It’s a whirlwind, a tsunami (*fluit*, 444)\(^{33}\), an earthquake (444-45):

*Tum caeco puluere campus*

*Miscetur pulsuque pedum tremit excita tellus.*

“Soon all the plain was a confusion of blinding dust, and the earth quaked and shuddered under their trampling feet.”\(^{34}\)

Strangely transfigured into a “Rhoeteian chieftain”, *ductor Rhoeteius*, 456, gigantic in size, *ingens*, 441, and “shaking in his hand a monstrous pike”, *telum immane manu quatiens*, 442, Aeneas emerges as an apparition to the terrified eyes of the Ausonians (the Latins). They, understandably, feel at that view an icy chill run through the very marrow of their bones (447-48):

*Videre Ausonii gelidusque per ima cucurrit / Ossa tremor.*

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\(^{31}\) Translation by A. T. Murray (1924):  

\(^{32}\) This is Victor Hugo’s well known insult, although he elsewhere hailed Virgil as his "maître divin". The realization of Virgil’s irony, *cacozelia latens*, would have prevented such an inconsistency.

\(^{33}\) “like a great wave”, comments R. D. Williams.

\(^{34}\) W. F. Jackson Knight.
And to amplify this apocalyptic picture, the poet summons the horrible specter of a huge and destructive typhoon “the frightened peasants - oh woe! - see coming from afar”, miseris, heu, praescia longe / Horrescunt corda agricolis (v. 452-53). Of course, Aeneas carries with him many soldiers, and yet he seems to be by himself alone this typhoon (Ille uolat… / Qualis…, 450-1, “he swept on like a storm”)\(^{35}\), all the more since, by a melting effect between the man and the exterminating plague, this ille is taken on at line 453 (dabit ille ruinas / Arboribus: “It [the typhoon] will overthrow the trees”), and uolat at line 455 (Ante uolant... uenti, “the winds fly before him”). There is nothing like that in the Homeric subtext, Iliad, 2.780-85, where it is the whole Greek army on the march that “makes the ground moan as when Zeus lashed the earth around Typhon.”

Enlarged to the fantastic dimensions of a typhoon, Aeneas has nothing human: he is a scourge, a calamity, a natural disaster, in front of which the weak mortals that we are can only wait and suffer, as those farmers facing a cataclysm (v. 452-54):

\[
miseris, heu, prescia longe
\]

\[
Horrescunt corda agricolis: dabit ille ruinas
\]

\[
Arboribus stragemque satis, ruet omnia late.
\]

“The poor farmers, who’ve sensed its arrival

Well in advance, are in panic; its torrents will flatten the grain-crops,

Uproot trees, overwhelming their world with complete devastation.”\(^{36}\)

Hyperbole and exaggeration are inherent to the epic genre, but if we compare Virgil to Homer, we get the impression that the Latin poet overdoes it. M. Vipsanius Agrippa denominated cacozelia latens this sort of satirical overzealousness he accused Virgil of displaying in a satirical intent\(^{37}\).

Admittedly, Aeneas’ terrifying apparition is not intended to trigger a frank hilarity, but the poet didn’t either want to leave us helplessly vulnerable to the fascination of this unbridled violence. Suddenly, in the middle of the parenthesis, he suspends time and space to move in

\(^{35}\) F. Ahl.

\(^{36}\) F. Ahl.

\(^{37}\) Cf. Suet.-Don., Vit. Verg. 44.
the lost world of his beloved *Georgics*, and, becoming a peasant among the peasants, he shares their anxiety about the impending weather threat. “Oh! Unhappy farmers!” he exclaims at the moment when the Latins are about to bear the tremendous impact of the Trojan army. Certainly, his cry is pathetic, but in such circumstances, one cannot help perceiving in it a hint of *cacozelia* aimed at Aeneas. Again, the comparison with Homer is telling. In the fourth book of the *Iliad* (v. 275-79), when Agamemnon reviews the troops of the two Ajax, the Greek poet, to give us an idea of the impressive power of these battalions, paints a picture of a humble goatherd who, at the approach of a dark cloud, hurries to lead his flock away. That's all, but we expect that this gap between the comparing and the compared was already funny for old Homer: so, what about his Latin emulator, who increases so strongly on the model, both for the violence of his description and for his empathy to the (imagined) victims? At the instant fatality will hit him, he half smiles, as a discreet sign of his contempt, a revenge of the weak over the strong, of the victim over his executioner, of spirit over the crushing matter. *Heu ! miseris agricolis…*

Then the Trojans throw themselves furiously on the enemy army and rout it. One would probably expect that Aeneas take an active part in this joyous carnage. Not at all. He refrains from any violence, he wants “Turnus, Turnus or nothing”, *solum… Turnum… solum…* (466-67). Is this not an exemplary behavior, that of a man who is so respectful of the treaty signed that he wants to apply to its terms even at the price of his life? Except that this time he takes few risks, being armed from head to foot; and besides, remember, the treaty had not been actually sealed. His restraint therefore owes nothing to any pacifism, but is explained again by the despite of having been robbed of a victory he felt easy, and also by a personal resentment against a rival whose elimination would at once make him the master of the two armies, as well as Lavinia’s husband. And finally, there is his boundless pride: feeling like a demigod, he “never stoops to leveling” (*neque… dignatur sternere morti*, 464) any other fighter than the enemy chief (cf. *indigno*, 411).

Turnus does not flee the fighting. But Juturna, his sister and protector, replaces his charioteer and takes over the reins in order to prevent his meeting with the Trojan leader.

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38 R. Fagles. The echo to 10.732 (*fugientem haud is dignatus Oroden / Sternere*) establishes between Aeneas and Mezentius a parallel which is not to the advantage of the first: if Mezentius refrains from killing an enemy who turns his back, it is to respect the code of honor; Aeneas, it’s by disdain and contempt (“Aeneas disdains to kill even those who confront him openly”, R. Tarrant).
Then a harrowing “ballet” begins for Aeneas. Launching himself into the pursuit of his enemy’s chariot which always escapes him, he runs in all directions, screaming loudly (\textit{magna / Voce uocat, 482-83}). Visibly Juturna has fun (v. 477-80):

\begin{quote}
\textit{medios Iuturna per hostis

\textit{Fertur equis rapidoque uolans obit omnia curru,

\textit{Iamque hic germanum iamque hic ostentat ouantem

\textit{Nec conferre manum patitur, uolat auia longe.}
\end{quote}

“Juturna herself darted behind the horses through the enemy’s midst, and flew with the chariot’s violent onrush, ranging the whole plain.”\textsuperscript{39}

To illustrate the marvelous agility and velocity of the nymph, Virgil uses an original image which is all of his own, that of a swallow swinging in all directions across the atrium of a wealthy owner (v. 473-77). The comparison has not failed to surprise, especially as the poet, seemingly forgetting his narrative, lingers a little too complacently to follow with the eye that particular “black shape” (\textit{Nigra, 473}, so far away from his substantive, \textit{hirundo})\textsuperscript{40} “scavenging morsels, banquet scraps / for her chirping nestlings”\textsuperscript{41}. It’s only too easy here for commentators to reprimand the author in the name of logic and appropriateness\textsuperscript{42}. But one should never criticize Virgil without previously examining all possibilities to justify him, and, in the present case, the assumption of \textit{cacozelia} imposes itself with force. In the \textit{Aeneid}, overzealousness sometimes leads to irony and sometimes, as here, to humor, a typically Virgilian one, full of finesse and discretion, and all the more effective. By focusing as he does on his swallow, Virgil delays action exactly like Juturna by her game retards as much as she can the final confrontation. Both are accomplices, both are having fun in their own way at the expense of the ancestor of the Caesars.

\textsuperscript{39} W.F. Jackson Knight.

\textsuperscript{40} The effect is particularly well rendered by F. Ahl: “Think of a black shape flitting to vast estates of a wealthy / Master: a swallow”.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Pabula parua legens nidisque loquacibus escas, 475} (translation by R. Fagles).

\textsuperscript{42} “There is an unusually rare proportion of non-similar elements in the simile”, R. D. Williams wryly comments. But others are more severe, even J. Delille, a Virgilian at heart however: “Cette comparaison, d’ailleurs remplie d’images gracieuses, n’est pas d’une exactitude parfaite… Les anciens connaissaient moins que nous les rapports de certaines choses entre elles, etc.” (\textit{L’Enéide, Paris, 1804, ad loc.}).
Breathless, and not knowing what to do, Aeneas has finally stopped. The poet shows his hero’s dismay (v. 486-87), and, under the cover of pity (**Heu, quid agat?**"Ah, what can he do?")a pity which cannot be sincere in the context we have just analyzed⁴³, he strikes to him another blow. This is called false commiseration, that is to say, basically, humor. But if we still doubted the author’s malignant intent, the coincidence of this **Heu, quid agat?** and that of 4.283 would be enough to convince us. This new occurrence once again abolishes time and space, by sending us to Carthage at the time Aeneas, in his “burning” haste to flee (**Ardet abire fuga**, 281), wonders (“but what could he do?”, **Heu, quid agat?**) how he will get rid of the Queen.

Return to the battlefield, where you have to kill or be killed. Messapus, the valiant Messapus, has spotted the Trojan chief, a choice target, and he aims his spear at him. But Aeneas has seen the missile coming and, bending his knee, he has taken shelter under his arms. The pike so does not hit him, but a part of the helmet is carried away and the feathers of the crest are plucked. Is not that a sacrilege and an unforgivable treachery (**insidiis**, 494)... at least in the eyes of Aeneas, for this **insidiis** offers a pure case of focalisation (= “what he called treachery”)? But where is treachery, one wonders, since, even though there would have been a violation of the treaty⁴⁴, Messapus was in his right in attacking Aeneas after the resumption of hostilities. But the Trojan does not want to know that. Someone has dared to touch the feathers of his helmet, he finds this unbearable. So he goes into an uncontrollable rage, and, as the poet says, “he lets his violence run free”, **irarumque omnis effundit habenas**, 499⁴⁵, that is to say - if one rightly understands the expression **saeuam nullo discrimine caedem**, 498 (“a dreadful massacre, sparing none”)⁴⁶-1, he will get rid of all the laws of war. It’s true that this expression is often interpreted in favor of Aeneas in the sense that he would consider that he has now the right to fight⁴⁷, but the rest of the story will show that he will kill “without making any difference” between soldiers and civilians, armed and unarmed, men

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⁴³ « seems more an expression of Aeneas’s frustration than a show of sympathy from the narrator”, R. Tarrant.

⁴⁴ For that is the ordinary explanation of this **insidiis**: “Jusqu’ici, Enée s’est conformé au pacte que les Latins ont violé…” (F. Plessis - P. Lejay, Paris, 1911); “‘impelled by their treachery’, in attacking them where he was not fighting them but only seeking Turnus.” (R. D. Williams).

⁴⁵ A. Mandelbaum.

⁴⁶ “sparing none” is R. Fagles’ rendition of **nullo discrimine**; others have “indiscriminate”, perhaps more ambiguous (see next note).

⁴⁷ See for instance R. D. Williams: “For a long time Aeneas has been trying to observe the spirit of the treaty for single combat by attacking only Aeneas; but now he yields to battle-fury and attacks indiscriminately.”
and women, or even children. We will soon see him pursue a disarmed Turnus, threatening to kill anyone who would try to bring him his sword (v. 760-62). We will also see him when, under the inspiration of his divine mother, “the very beautiful one”, pulcherrima, 554, he threatens the Latin capital to reduce it to ashes and put to the sword all its inhabitants unless it surrenders unconditionally (a threat renewed at v. 761-62). This time the bloody buffoon no longer makes us laugh at all: he is terrifying (terribilis, 498, 947; ferox, 895).

Conclusion

This savage ultimatum will precipitate the denouement. Now, the clash between the two champions will become inevitable. Sentenced to death from the heights of Olympus, betrayed by a sword that is not his, deserted by his own forces, abandoned by all, Turnus will still suffer the taunts of his "pious" enemy, before being "sacrificed" as an animal, under the eyes of the two armies gathered. It is as if Virgil, at the approach of this tragic outcome, had taken at heart to chastise his sinister “pious” hero with the almost invisible arrows of a bitter irony, and even, as we have seen, descending personally in the arena. After all, Emperor Augustus had no qualm about rescuing surreptitiously (see addendum) his supposed ancestor, whose image, he knew, was inseparable from his.

ADDENDUM : Suspicion on lines 213b-15

“Talibus inter se firmabant foedera dictis
Conspectu in medio procerum. Tum rite sacratas
In flammis iugulant pecudes et uiscera uiuis)"

48 After he has recovered his sword, he faces the enemy, but Aeneas, with an enormous pike in his hand (“a tree”, ingens arboreum, 887), prevents him from coming to his contact, even though he had challenged him to engage “up close” (F. Ahl), “and to hand’ (A. Mandelbaum): comminus, 690! And in fact, it is "from a distance" eminus, 921, that he will reach him. No chivalry from the Trojan, and this is perhaps also suggested at the very last line of the poem by the word indignata: Turnus is certainly indignant at not having received a response to his legitimate request (that at least his body be returned to his father), but also at having been defeated unfairly.

49 Fors against Virtus, according to v. 714. It is for the reader to decide who stands for virtue, and who for luck.
**Eripiunt cumulantque oneratis lancibus aras.**

So, on such terms

they sealed a pact of peace between both sides,

witnessed by all the officers of the armies.

Then they slash the throats of the hallowed victims

over the flames, and tear their pulsing entrails out

ond heap the altars high with groaning platters.”^50

These four lines (at least 213b-15, because, as we said earlier, the imperfect *firmabant* describes a process that may well have been interrupted) are surprising, since we know (cf. *supra* pp. 3-5) that the conclusion of the treaty had remained in suspense, until it would be sealed in the blood of victims. Let’s put ourselves for a moment in Augustus’ shoes, when, after Virgil’s programmed death, he had a free hand to "redirect" as discreetly as possible that *Aeneid* whose malignant intentions towards his person did not escape him. Had he not the greatest interest in accrediting, even in spite of the text, the idea that the pact had actually been concluded, so that Aeneas was in his right by demanding its application?

The addition could easily fit at the pivot between the exchange of oaths and the silent revolt of the Latins against a treaty as unequal as infamous for them, and be quite naturally “grafted” on a line left incomplete, we will assume, by the author^51. Notice that 214 repeats XI, 199, while 215 does little more than copy 8.284, and *uiscera uius / Eripiunt* clearly, but unthinkingly^52, remembers 1.211-12 (*tergora diripiunt costis et uiscera nudant / ueribusque trementia figunt*).

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^50 R. Fagles.

^51 The twelfth book is the one that has the fewest incomplete lines: only one besides 213a. However, it cannot be excluded that the four lines have been interpolated to fill a gap left between the exchange of vows and the Latin revolt.

^52 At 1.211-12, it is a malicious touch against the gluttony of the Trojans (see the online anti-*Aeneid*); but here, the poet has no reason to insist as he does (including by the alliteration) on the cruelty of sacrifice. R. Tarrant rightly compares Ov. *Mét.* XV, 136-37 (*Protinus ereptas uiuenti pectore fibras / Inspectiunt mentesque deum scrutantur in illis*), whose accusatory tone confirms if need be the Virgilian intention.