Receiving Virgil in the Twenty-first Century

STEPHEN HARRISON

In the introduction to his volume, Juan Christian Pellicer sets out to reinforce a widespread view amongst scholars of classical reception that "encounters between ancient and modern art can occasion two-way channels of interpretation that serve a valuable critical purpose" (5). Modern works can make a "preposterous" (i.e., time-reversed) contribution to the study of classical works to which they allude, since "the past is altered by the present" (5) and the newer work can "open up fresh hermeneutical possibilities" for the older one. The thesis topic invented by David Lodge (in his novel *Small World*, 1984) on "the influence of T.S. Eliot on Shakespeare" can thus have a real hermeneutic function, not just in showing how Eliot's work and authority as literary critic genetically underlies many subsequent approaches to Shakespeare, but also in seeing how Eliot's poetic reception and reworking of Shakespearean texts in, for example, "The Waste Land" can contribute to their analysis and interpretation. Such later appropriations, Pellicer argues, "can help us find ways that lead to Virgil through his reception" (17).

For Pellicer, as for many inclined towards reader-response theory, the repertory of the particular reader is a crucial part of reception analysis in detecting relevant allusions (9): "confronted with a text that looks or sounds allusive,

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we respond with our past experience, experimentally trying out configurations of elements old and new" since "modern works of art [. . .] will often recall things already known [. . .] which also need to be experienced and contextualized afresh." He prefers the term "allusion" to "intertextuality," holding that the former importantly implies a cognitive event is involved, one in effect of literary memory: "to read allusively is to read a text through one's reading of other texts" (12).

All this will appeal to those classicists who value the insight of Charles Martindale (in *Redeeming The Text*, 1993) that "meaning is always realized at the point of reception," and therefore realized through the contingently determined mental contents of a particular receiver in a particular cultural environment. This could, in my view, be extended to any reading of earlier texts in a later period, for example the study of classical literature in general in the twenty-first century; as Nietzsche said in "We Philologists" (1875), "antiquity has in fact always been understood from the perspective of the present."

When we come to the contemporary study of past classical receptions, the topic of this volume, a further layer inserts itself. When we consider, for example, the reception of Virgil in Milton, we are looking at three cultural points and contexts: that of Virgil himself in the first century BCE, that of Milton in the seventeenth century CE, and that of ourselves in the twenty-first. This can be both diverse and familiar. While we have come to accept in the modern period that the world of ancient Rome is vastly distant and other ("It was all so unimaginably different / And all so long ago," as Louis MacNeice characterized ancient

Greece in "Autumn Journal"), that of early modern Europe can be more accessible, at least in its classical receptions. Though the world of Milton presents a considerable cultural alterity for moderns in terms of religion, society, and politics, it shows an extensive similarity in terms of the conventional classical canon then available through advanced education. Milton's repertoire of allusion is consequently not unlike that of learned modern readers.

A key point here is whether reception is wholly a matter of the reactive role of the reader/receiver, or whether something of the original artefact somehow forces its way through into future contexts through its sheer cultural power and weight. This latter idea was a common approach earlier in the twentieth century (for example in Gilbert Highet's *The Classical Tradition*, 1949), and has been revived to some degree in the twenty-first. *The Classical Tradition: Art, Literature, Thought* (2014, by Michael Silk, Ingo Gildenhard, and Rosemary Barrow) presents a forcefully expressed case against the view that all considerations of the relation between classical past(s) and later present(s) are a matter of reception. I cite at length from their introduction (4–5):

> The classical tradition overlaps with the reception (or receptions) of Greece and Rome. They are not the same thing, and for several reasons [. . .] the classical tradition is wider in scope. Many of its embodiments are not classical receptions in any meaningful sense. Postclassical versions of classical archetypes sometimes involve reception, sometimes not. Equally, the Romance and Modern Greek languages are momentous post-classical reflexes of Latin and Ancient Greek, and as such clearly belong to the classical

tradition, but they are not, in themselves, 'receptions' of anything. Whether the same should be said of Medieval Latin, and of Renaissance Latin too, is another matter; both, in any event, belong straightforwardly to the tradition. Then again, the classical tradition, as a continuum, subsumes not only direct engagements with antiquity, but engagements with earlier engagements. Like Eliot, the poet Milton responds to Virgil's poetry; unlike Eliot, he responds not as critic, but by and within his own poetry, which—from *Lycidas* to *Paradise Lost*—creates (among much else) an idiosyncratic classicizing idiom that looks back to classical Latinity in general and Virgil's Latin among others [. . .] Above all, though, whereas 'classical' and 'tradition' tend to prompt consideration of value, 'reception' does not. In a nutshell, the 'classical' of 'the classical tradition' tends to imply canonicity, even when the post-antique engagement with the antique is anti-canonical (as is the case, most obviously, with engagements within popular culture). Indeed, notwithstanding the fact that it is precisely the value associated with the classical over hundreds of years that has brought its multiple receptions into being, reception studies tend to operate in a relativistic spirit, generally preferring cultural-historical engagement with such issues to critical engagement. All in all: reception studies have helped to make what was once the preoccupation of a minority of classicists, and others, fashionable—while reception theory has helped to generate better understandings of various aspects of the field—but in no sense has 'reception' itself been shown to redefine, let alone to replace, 'the classical tradition' itself.

A more reception-oriented critic could respond that "classical archetypes" and "classical reflexes" only exist because of post-classical individuals and groups recognizing, appropriating, and adapting classical elements. For example, Palladian neo-classical architecture derives at least partly from the engagement of Renaissance writers such as Alberti, Serlio, and Palladio himself with the Roman manual of Vitruvius, a tradition continued in eighteenth-century Britain in the *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1715–25) of the architect Colen Campbell. Similarly, classical Latin and classical Greek develop into vernacular languages both through gradual contact with other linguistic traditions, and through active intervention. A drive to replicate the literary language of Roman antiquity is the key feature of Renaissance Latin or neo-Latin, initiated by Petrarch in the fourteenth century as a revival of the style of the key ancient Latin authors (initially Virgil and Cicero); this is a highly active process involving engagement and study by actual individuals, not just a feature of "the tradition." A similar drive played a central and highly politicized role in the codification of modern Greek after the establishment of the modern Greek state in the nineteenth century. Likewise, the engagements of modern writers with classical texts mediated through other modern writers could just as easily be said to represent active receptions as continuations of the tradition.

A major point of this stress on the "classical tradition" is its association with value: classical texts survive and are read because of their aesthetic density, cultural maturity, and capacity to appeal to generations of readers (as argued in Eliot's 1944 "What is a Classic?", originally his

presidential address to the Virgil Society). This is hard to deny completely: classical texts such as Virgil's *Aeneid* do indeed survive partly because of their rich technical form (in Virgil's case, the supreme example of Latin hexameter composition from a stylistic perspective, as specialist modern scholarship continues to show), as well as their major and thought-provoking subject-matter covering issues constant in human experience (the horrors of war and exile, tensions in gender roles, and the difficulties of political leadership). But they also survive because of their canonical status and inclusion on the syllabuses of education, generated by the purposes and preferences of particular groups of readers. For example, the nineteenth-century English cult of the gentleman led to the prizing amongst Roman poets of Horace, who could be most easily assimilated to the gentlemanly ideal (see my *Victorian Horace: Classics and Class*, 2017).

A fruitful approach here is that of Hans Robert Jauss, who combines literary aesthetics with literary history. In his *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982), Jauss suggests that readers in any period read literary texts against a particular "horizon of expectation," their own knowledge of and attitudes to literature, and that the meanings of literary works thus shift across time as that horizon varies with new generations of readers in new historical and cultural contexts. Thus readers can make aesthetic and critical judgements, but these are contingent on their own situation and not transtemporal truths. This can account for patterns in classical reception: thus (for example) the current popularity of Ovid in the twenty-first century and his lack of popularity in the nineteenth both reflect

differing contemporary cultures (post-modern and Victorian).

Jauss's insights have recently been employed in classical reception studies in the form of "transformation" (for example in *Classics Transformed*, edited by Giancarlo Abbamonte and Craig Kallendorf, 2018, and *Beyond Reception: Renaissance Humanism and the Transformation of Classical Antiquity,* edited by Patrick Baker, Johannes Helmrath, and Craig Kallendorf, 2019). This model stresses the creative reciprocal interaction between the "reference sphere" (the ancient text or phenomenon and its context) and the "reception sphere" (its modern counterpart and its context, analogous to the Jaussian "horizon of expectation"). The reception sphere inevitably has its own view of the reference sphere through later cultural and historical change (e.g., the invention of print and wider education and literacy), and thus introduces new forms of interpretation and understanding of the ancient artefact for each new period. This can be readily understood by classical scholars, for whom (for example) the modern recognition since G.N. Knauer's magisterial *Die Aeneis und Homer* (1964) of the full extent of Virgil's assimilation and manipulation of both the Homeric epics in his *Aeneid* has led to a richer reading of both Homer and Virgil.

Thus, Pellicer's suggestion that "Virgil would be incomprehensible without his reception" (59) is thoroughly plausible: the classical poet whose work has exercised more influence on Western culture than any other must always be read as part of an ongoing process in which each generation of readers and concerns takes its place.

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Pellicer's book begins with a discussion of Little Sparta, the remarkable garden designed by the Scottish poet and artist Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925–2006) in the Pentland Hills south of Edinburgh. The garden contains a number of classicising inscriptions, sculptures, and miniature buildings, some of which evoke Virgil's *Eclogues* as a poem of rural peace while also showing links with the French Revolution and other later historical references. Pellicer attractively suggests that this is a layered form of Virgilian reception which can retrospectively illuminate the original pastoral text, bringing out its elements of both idyll and political conflict.

One could add that Virgilian allusions in British gardens themselves have a rich history with which Hamilton Finlay engages. Several of the most famous English country-house gardens of the eighteenth century interact with the *Aeneid* through names and inscriptions: that at Stourhead in Wiltshire has been plausibly presented as the founder's own version of Aeneas's journey to Italy, while that at Stowe in Buckinghamshire uses elements from *Aeneid* 6 (the paradise of the Elysian Fields and a sculptural display of the British Worthies, an updating of Virgil's Show of (Roman) Heroes) to reflect the owner's oppositional views in the English politics of the time. There is surely something of this history in Little Sparta, whose politically radical owner used its principles to create other gardens for public use which democratized the oligarchic tradition of the private landscape garden. Thus gardens as well as texts can be part of a reception process.

Pellicer's second case-study, Tom Stoppard's play *Arcadia* of 1993, is actually set in a fictional country house

with a garden designed by the great Lancelot "Capability" Brown, who was a key figure in the landscape design of Stowe. Stoppard's typically complex drama, oscillating between parallel events in 1809 and the contemporary world of the early 1990s, has at first blush relatively little Virgilian color. However, as Pellicer stresses, the Virgilian character of the play's title is spelled out by the character Hannah Jarvis, a landscape historian: "English landscape was invented by gardeners imitating foreign painters who were evoking classical authors. The whole thing was brought home in the luggage from the grand tour. Here, look—Capability Brown doing Claude, who was doing Virgil. Arcadia!"

This statement of origins can be usefully unpacked in terms of its key reception ideas. On the one hand, the sequence Brown/Claude/Virgil points to a mediated and intermedial approach to classical reception: Brown receives his version of Virgil's idyllic landscape not from the poetry of Virgil but from the paintings of Claude Lorrain. These Mediterranean classical landscapes with spectacular vistas, impressive trees, and classical herdsmen evoke the world of the *Eclogues* (e.g., in "Pastoral Landscape" now in London's Victoria and Albert Museum). In turn, Claude's further paintings specifically referring to the *Aeneid* (e.g., "Landscape with Aeneas at Delos" in London's National Gallery, or "Landscape with Ascanius Shooting the Stag of Sylvia" in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford) suggest that he may have had more contact than Brown with Virgil's pastoral text: verse becomes painting becomes landscape garden.

The term "Arcadia," too, hides a complex issue of reception history. As Pellicer rightly points out, the very

limited appearances of Arcadia in Virgil's *Eclogues* (only the last poem of Virgil's ten is set there) point to the landscape typical of the real Arcadia in southern Greece, in the harsh and mountainous center of the Peloponnese. The tamer and softer Arcadia to be found in the gardens of Brown and the paintings of Claude derives largely from its depiction in Renaissance works such as the *Arcadia* of Sannazaro and its adaptation in Sir Philip Sidney, an idyllic Italianate landscape of pleasure, song, and love.

Though Stoppard's play uses this later redirection of Virgil's Arcadia in its setting of a notionally paradisiacal landscape, it also brings out elements central to the *Eclogues* themselves, whether consciously or unconsciously. Like Finlay Hamilton's Little Sparta, Stoppard's country estate juxtaposes idyll and conflict just as in Virgil's pastoral world, where the beauty of the landscape and its ownership can be both the source of tranquility and satisfaction and the object of strife through political change and confiscation of the lands on which the herdsmen operate. It is also the scene of a good deal of erotic interest, competition, and frustration, familiar to the readers of the affairs of Virgil's herdsmen, often stressing and lamenting their rivalries and vicissitudes in love.

Pellicer well brings out how *Arcadia* reflects the mixed generic color of the Virgilian original, which looks to contemporary Latin love elegy as well as to previous Greek pastoral in its presentation of intense and unfulfilled erotic longing: Stoppard's play, though more playful in general tone, can at times capture the color of tragic love conveyed in Corydon's lament for his unsuccessful passion in *Eclogue* 2. There is also in *Arcadia,* as in the *Eclogues*, a sense of

larger figures and issues off-stage: Lord Byron, who plays a significant role both in the 1809 plot (as a recent visitor to the house and thereby a catalyst for some of the action) and in the 1990s plot (as the subject of a publicity-seeking academic's supposed revelation) might be seen to reflect the young Caesar and future Augustus, the similarly off-stage catalyst for the key action of land-confiscation and land-retention in the *Eclogues.* And as Pellicer suggests, the deep engagement of Stoppard's play with mathematics and physics matches quasi-scientific issues in Virgil's text such as the idea of cosmic renewal in *Eclogue* 4. *Arcadia*, then, can help us to reflect on the themes of the *Eclogues* anew, a key role of classical reception.

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The book's second chapter looks at W.H.Auden's poem "The Shield of Achilles" (1952), and seeks to show how Auden's reception of this ekphrastic scene from the *Iliad* is influenced by Virgil's own reception of it in the *Aeneid*, where it serves as the model for the parallel description of the Shield of Aeneas, similarly made by the divine smith-god (Hephaestus/Vulcan) at the prompting of the hero's mother (Thetis/Venus). This chain of receptions again constitutes a process in which both later versions invite the reader with appropriate knowledge to reflect on the three literary scenes. A further link in the chain (Pellicer rightly stresses) is another classicizing Auden poem of the same decade, "Secondary Epic" (1959), here operating "preposterously" in showing Auden's poetic reaction to the Shield of Aeneas which can illuminate his earlier poetic reaction to the Shield of Achilles.

The images on the Homeric shield, though they include a contrasting pair of cities at peace and war, primarily present a wider world of rich and lively agricultural and social activity, a clear contrast to the narrow, stark, and brutal scenario of the *Iliad*, fought out in the close siege of the city of Troy. In Auden's version, Achilles' mother Thetis expects to see the cheering content of the Homeric shield but instead sees a modern Orwellian world of totalitarian war ("A million eyes, a million boots in line"), cruel executions ("As three pale figures were led forth and bound / To three posts driven upright in the ground"), and a desolate environment where "girls are raped" and "two boys knife a third."

As Pellicer notes, Auden thus inserts in his Homeric version the "passive sufferers of the distinctly modern kind of warfare that overwhelms and blurs the distinction between soldier and civilian, denying the focus of epic on the heroic individual" (79), showing a distinctly modern approach to war. Here we might plausibly add a further link in the reception chain, another prominent classical poetic representation of Achilles, this time in the wedding-song of the Fates at the marriage of his mother Thetis (the very viewer of Auden's poem) to his father Peleus, as narrated in Catullus 64. This wedding-song is a prophecy about the future greatness of Achilles, which looks forward (with black irony) to his career of bloody violence which climaxes in the sacrifice of the Trojan princess Polyxena on his tomb; this is an atrocity involving a civilian close to those depicted by Auden on the shield which he presents as made to please "the strong / Iron-hearted man-slaying Achilles / Who would not live long." Auden's modern-looking

undermining of heroic individualism may thus take something from a Roman poet other than Virgil in the long process of reception.

A further methodological point that could be made here is that this kind of complex historical intertextuality imitates the Roman literary fabric of the poetry of both Catullus and Virgil, both drawing on previous prominent texts; just as Virgil's shield draws on that of Homer, so Auden draws on Catullus's Achilles. Auden thus applies a Virgilian mode of operation to Homeric material. Similarly, as Pellicer well notes (76), Auden deploys the Virgilian narrative framework of describing the shield as a complete artefact after its manufacture rather than the Homeric one of recounting its images as they are manufactured by its divine artificer. The process of Auden's reception of Homer via Virgil and Catullus echoes Virgil's and Catullus's own Homeric reception.

Auden's "Secondary Epic" follows his "Shield of Achilles" (and indeed Stoppard's *Arcadia*) in playing with two time levels. There, Virgil's triumphalist rhetoric about the greatness of Rome under Augustus as depicted on the Shield of Aeneas is cast as a prophecy since the Roman state lies centuries ahead in the narrative time of the *Aeneid*, but Auden attacks Virgil with strict logic: if Vulcan, the divine maker of the shield, can look forward centuries into the future, why cannot he also anticipate the future demise of empire which Augustus is founding, a few centuries further in the future? As in "The Shield of Achilles," an unedifying and barbarous future is imagined for a great artefact of classical literature, this time through an imagined addition to Virgil's text which does narrate the

fall of the western Roman empire, "the composition / Of a down-at-heels refugee rhetorician / With an empty belly, seeking employment, / Cooked up in haste for the drunken enjoyment / of some blond princeling."

Thus Auden's poetic reworking of Virgil, written after his poetic reworking of Homer, reveals how his reception of Virgil influences his reception of Homer in both form and content. Traditional heroic epic and its lauding of great men has no place in the modern era, where war and political decline lead to barbarism and anarchy; the subject-matter of war and empire is robbed of its glory and glamour, in an era when short ironic poems stand in the place of long encomiastic epics in the classical mode, even if their interactive intertextuality replicates an ancient texture. This is another prime example of classical reception as process over various time-levels.

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The third chapter considers links between Virgil and Wordsworth. The pairing of these two sonorous and meditative poets of nature is a plausible one: the *Georgics* and *The Prelude* have often been compared, and Wordsworth translated three books of the *Aeneid* as well as some fragments of the *Georgics* into English verse. Pellicer sees Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" (1798) as a response to Virgil's prayer at the end of *Georgics* 2 to be an enthusiastic poet of the country without ambition for fame, similarly looking to the future of the poet's work, a passage (as Pellicer points out) that Wordsworth included in the parts of the

Georgics he translated as a Cambridge student. As Pellicer says, Virgil looks back to his earlier experiences of nature in the same environment, one of the many ways in which the self-focus of the Romantic poet strikes a note quite different from the generally recessive Virgilian persona (another is the address to his sister Dorothy: as Pellicer notes, we know nothing of Virgil's personal relationships).

Pellicer makes a good case that Wordsworth's intertextual engagement here with Virgil enriches our reading of the Latin poet, connecting the river Wye (the location of Tintern) with the streams greeted at the end of *Georgic*s 2 and taking them to represent the poetic freedom of the world of nature as covered in the *Georgics* and *Eclogues* (contrasting with the more public and complex world of the *Aeneid*). The localized connection with inspiring waters celebrated in poetry could also be linked with the poetic world of Horace, who in his praise of the *fons Bandusiae* (*Odes* 3.13) similarly identifies and celebrates a body of water which represents a poetic stimulus (whether we think the *fons* is in Horace's natal region or on his Sabine estate). Pellicer's argument that the old Corycian of *Georgics* 4 represents a model of Epicurean rustic self-sufficiency and a lifelong ideal for Virgil is both attractive in itself and another analogy with the Wordsworth who sought the tranquillity of communities set in the retirement of nature.

It is worth adding that "Tintern Abbey" also has a further intertextual engagement with Virgil in some of its most celebrated lines, in the poet's identification within himself of:

a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

These lines look to *Aeneid* 6.724–7 (my translation):

First of all the heaven, the lands and the liquid plains
And the shining sphere of the moon and the Titans' stars
Are nourished within by a spirit, and a consciousness spread
through its limbs
Shakes the whole mass and mixes itself with its great body.

Anchises' characterization of the Stoic-style world-spirit in his Underworld speech explaining the nature of the universe is recast by Wordsworth as a personal Romantic sympathy with nature, but like its ancient model points to the world-controlling operation of a divine power.

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The fourth chapter looks at Seamus Heaney's engagement with Virgil in the latter part of his career, a topic which has enjoyed an extended and rich treatment in Rachel Falconer's simultaneous *Seamus Heaney, Virgil and the Good of Poetry* (2022). Pellicer rightly stresses the analogies between the two poets' careers, moving from the poetry of

nature to the poetry of public issues: this is matched in Heaney's later years by his transition from versions of the *Eclogues* (in *Electric Light*, 2001) to his posthumous translation of *Aeneid* 6 (2016). He also points out the prominence of filial piety in both poets, a key theme both of the *Aeneid* and of Heaney's later verse, especially after the death of his father in 1986, an excellent observation. For Heaney, as ever, this is much more personal, bringing out his own key concern with his family, again a wholly unVirgilian element, but one which is among the secrets of Heaney's approachability as a poet despite his high literary sophistication.

A particularly interesting contribution by Pellicer here is his suggestion of traces of Virgil much earlier in Heaney's work. On the one hand, he rightly links Heaney's "Aisling" from *North* (1975), treating a typical Irish literary scene of an encounter with a mysterious and quasi-divine female lamenting figure, with Aeneas's meeting with his disguised mother in the first book of the *Aeneid* (1.305–417). On the other hand, the connection suggested between Heaney's "Act of Union" in the same collection (pointing to the tense historic status of Irish/British relations after 1800) with Aeneas's offer of political union to the Latins in *Aeneid* 12 (12.191–2) is less plausible, even as a subversion of a vision of eventual inter-community harmony; a better candidate might be Dido's offer of a common and equal community for Troy and Carthage at *Aeneid* 1.574, which ironically anticipates centuries of future strife between the two nations.

Pellicer rightly points out that Heaney never alludes detectably to Virgil's *Georgics*, surprising for a farm-born

poet whose most famous early works engage with the close details of the cultivation of the land. He suggests several reasons: that Heaney did not need a classical model to write about his own environment, that the lack of personal detail about the poet in the *Georgics* is alien to Heaney, and that its more impersonal type of allusiveness suits him less well than that of the *Eclogues* in writing about country life. It is worth suggesting a further cause: the essential allegory of the *Georgics* between citizen agriculture and the reconstruction of Roman society after decades of civil war does not fit the Northern Irish situation before the end of the Troubles after 1998. It might have fitted the post-1998 situation, but by that point Heaney had found what he needed about land and politics in his reception of the *Eclogues*. Pellicer argues that Heaney does follow the *Georgics* in terms of poetic language, giving high poetic dignity and universal value to apparently mundane activity (rightly linking him with Wordsworth in this respect), but this is even more true of his deployment of the *Eclogues*.

This choice by Heaney of the Virgilian pastoral mode as a political vehicle is one with his insistence on the continuing viability of pastoral in the modern era, sometimes denied by critics, but rightly underlined by Pellicer. Heaney retains the intertextual power of pastoral by Virgilian allusion, thus replicating the complex texture of Virgil's pastoral poems themselves, which have a claim to be the most densely allusive verse in classical Latin. Here again a modern reception can teach us much about the poetic texture of a Latin original.

Another key point made by Pellicer is the role of Dante as intermediary between Heaney and Virgil, especially in

the eschatological visions and ghostly encounters found in his work after *Station Island* (1984). Here again Heaney's interaction with a source (Dante) echoes that source's own interaction with a further source (Virgil), an underlining of the chains of intertextuality needed for an adequate reading of Virgil, Dante, or Heaney, and of an important element in modern classical reception, which can never be wholly unmediated (see above). The idea that an encounter with spirits from the past is also an encounter with the texts of the past is fundamental for all three poets: this is explicit for Dante, conducted through the underworld by Virgil, famously proclaimed as his model in the first canto of the *Inferno,* and for Heaney, evoking, for example, the shade of Philip Larkin in "The Journey Back" (in *Seeing Things*, 1991), but it is also a feature of *Aeneid* 6, where many figures encountered by Aeneas in the underworld specifically evoke the past poetic traditions of Homer, Hesiod, and others; this may be one of the factors in Heaney's choice to render that particular Virgilian book at the end of his life.

This Dantean heritage is evident in both form and content in "Route 110"(in *Human Chain*, 2010). This poem is written in three-line stanzas which echo Dante's *terza rima*, just as its twelve sections each of twelve lines (four stanzas) echo the twelve books of the *Aeneid*, though it is in fact rewriting only one of them, *Aeneid* 6, the book already targeted for complete translation by Heaney. Pellicer acutely points out that by using selected episodes from the poem, Heaney avoids its political triumphalism, and that he neatly inverts and domesticates its climactic tragedy, the early death of Augustus's putative heir Mar-

cellus, by adapting it into a final celebration of the birth of a new grandchild of his own and her "baby talk." The local Ulster concerns of the text with Heaney's early life and its allusions to civil strife and the Irish Troubles look back to Dante's frequent focus on Florentine politics and feuds in the *Commedia* as well as to Virgil's history of Rome in the speech of Anchises at the end of *Aeneid* 6.

Pellicer's conclusion here is that Heaney's lifelong engagement showed a range of overall analogies between the two, and that Heaney reached for Virgil in response to the local needs of a particular poem which need to be carefully tracked in their intertextual engagement. This is persuasive, and underlines a key feature of classical reception, the way in which modern works take what they need from ancient ones and reshape it for their own purposes; as Pellicer puts it, Heaney like his contemporary Michael Longley, achieves a "reconfiguration of the Virgilian generic repertoire within the compass of lyric," adapting heftier Virgilian texts to a more modern brevity. This indeed demonstrates that (in the words of Eliot, another key figure for Heaney) "The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past": our reading of Virgil is not the same after our reading of his reception by Heaney.

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The concluding chapter brings in the two georgic poems of Vita Sackville-West (*The Land*, 1926, and *The Garden*, 1946). The first of these alludes consciously to the *Georgics* in its conclusion, while the second, cast as the sequel of the first, looks to the more comforting topic of gardens in

a time of world war, recalling the world-wide Roman civil war evoked at the end of *Georgics* 1. Both these long poems are organized in four books (as in Virgil's poem), but the alignment of the four books with the four seasons looks (as Pellicer records) to the tradition of the season-poem in English, most notably James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1746), which itself receives and reworks many aspects of the *Georgics*; like Heaney's Virgil, Sackville-West's Virgil is thus mediated through a chain of earlier English Virgilian receptions (this also includes Spenser and Cowper as well as Thomson).

Pellicer points out that *The Land* was a best-seller in its time, and so appealed to the general literary reader, but that its sophisticated intertextuality and metapoetic reflection in some ways matched that of contemporary modernism; like other recent scholars, he sees "no conflict between Virgil's mapping of the physical world and his metapoetical mapping of Graeco-Roman literary culture" (154). He attractively points to the way in which modern readers of Sackville-West need to imagine her contemporary readers as the original consumers of the text (see above), but also need to be aware of the class and financial privileges which allowed her writing: this led between the poems to her co-ownership of Sissinghurst Castle in Kent where she developed its now famous gardens, the eponymous subject of *The Garden*. This connection with the elite garden culture of England recalls the gardens of Hamilton Finlay and Stoppard's *Arcadia* (above).

Pellicer adds to recent work on Sackville-West's Virgilianism here: he rightly points to the way in which both poets use military metaphors for the eternal struggle of

the cultivator with the land, and attractively suggests that a passing mention in *The Land* to a swarm of bees and a snake-skin on the road alludes to Virgil's story of Orpheus and Eurydice, presented in *Georgics* 4 as the explanation for the extinction of Aristaeus's bees after the death of Eurydice from a snake-bite. One might add that her long section on bees in the same poem recalls Virgil's unrealistically long account of the bee-community in the same book of the *Georgics*. Pellicer makes a good case overall that a reading of Sackville-West enhances a reading of Virgil: her pointing of the reader towards the riches and beauties of nature can indeed remind us that, like her, Virgil wrote with warm engagement about the landscape of his own experience, for example in the encomium of Italy in *Georgics* 2, for the purposes of readerly pleasure, and evoked the wider (and similarly imperial) geographic world alongside it.

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It will be clear from the foregoing that I am thoroughly in sympathy with Pellicer's project to provide an enriched modern reading of Virgil through the study of an eclectic and stimulating series of literary receptions in English. His "preposterous Virgil" is fully viable and rewarding: later poetic use and appropriation of an ancient poet is never just imitation, but always an act of analysis, interpretation, and reception which can bring out key elements of the older text and fundamentally influence a modern reader's approach to it. This is one key reason for the continuing popularity of classical reception studies in its literary form.