

V.S. Lectures, No. 102

HEROISM IN VIRGIL

Text of a lecture read to the Virgil Society,

22nd May, 1971.

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At the end of his article "Apollonius' Argonautica: Jason as Anti-Hero" in Yale Classical Studies (Vol. 19, 1966) Gilbert Lawall says, "Success attends not the grand figure of a Heracles, nor the brilliant intellect and skill of a Polydeuces, nor the martial impetuosity of an Idas, nor even an unwavering piety, but success attends the initially weak, the always unadventurous, the circumventive, compromising, treacherous, and finally impious Jason, a man of resounding success whom no reader has ever found himself able to admire."<sup>(1)</sup> This is indeed a pessimistic conclusion, but it is a conclusion wholly in keeping with the bleak world of Apollonius' epic - a world only briefly illuminated by the warm and vibrant portrayal of Medea's passionate but tragic love. The pessimism inherent in Apollonius' portrayal of Jason may also be viewed in the wider context of a pervading realism and pessimism in Hellenistic literature and philosophy. Viewed in this wider perspective, Jason may stand as a symbol of the unique predicament and responses of Hellenistic man."

Part of this could be an equally apt description of the Aeneid. Success does not attend Camilla, Pallas, Turnus or Palinurus. Aeneas is not as dastardly as Jason and his success is partial, not resounding, but it is certainly true that many readers have found themselves unable to admire him. Virgil's pessimism has been much discussed and the word pessimism, particularly if loosely used, covers a wide spectrum of meaning. At one end of the scale it is a synonym for cynicism and for despair (not to be confused or identified with each other), and at the other end it is a virtual equivalent of compassion. This is not the place to discuss the nature of Apollonius' pessimism and I shall return to Virgil's pessimism later.

I now want to quote a modern poem by the Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh. The poem may seem totally irrelevant on first hearing but it expresses better than I can, though in extremely compressed form, some of the things I want to say. It begins with some caustic comments on the psychology of romantic hero-worship, which are painfully relevant to many criticisms of the Aeneid, and ends with a sentiment worthy of Virgil himself.

The Hero (2)

He was an ordinary man, a man full of humour,  
Born for no high sacrifice, to be no marble god;  
But all the gods had failed that harvest and someone  
spread the rumour  
That he might be deluded into taking on the job.

And they came to him in the spring  
And said: you are our poet-king.

Their evil weakness smiled on him and he had no  
answer to it,  
They drove him out of corners into the public gaze;  
And the more he tried to defend himself the more they  
cried, O poet  
Why must you always insult us when we only want to praise?  
And he said: I wish you would  
Pick on someone else to be your god.

They laughed when he told them he had no intention of  
dying  
For virtue of truth - that his ideal would be  
As a mediaeval Sultan, in a middle-class setting enjoying  
Many female slaves - where Luxury,  
All joyful mysteries,  
Takes Wisdom on her knees.

Thinking of the mean reality of middle-class life  
They saw the normal as outlandish joy  
And all of them embittered with a second-hand wife,  
Growing literary, begged him to die  
Before his vision become  
The slightest bit tame.

He advised them that the gods are invisibly cloaked by a crowd,  
Mortality touches the conspicuous;  
They had the wrong ideas of a god  
Who once all known becomes ridiculous.  
- I am as obvious as an auctioneer  
Dreaming of twenty thousand pounds a year.

At this they roared in the streets and became quite  
hysterical  
And he knew he was the cause of this noise -  
Yet he had acted reasonably, had performed no miracle,  
Had spoken in a conventional voice,  
And he said: surely you can  
See that I am an ordinary man?

But instead they rushed off and published in all the  
papers  
And magazines the photographs of their poet genius, god;  
And all the cafes buzzed with his outrageous sayings - (3)  
He feared he was beaten and might have to take the job  
For one day in the insincere city  
He had an attack of self-pity.

He looked in the shoe-shop windows where all the shoes  
were toys.

Everything else similarly scaled down;  
The hotels were doll's houses of doll's vice -  
He was trapped in a pygmy town.  
Vainly on all fours  
He tried the small doors.

Crowds of little men went in with smooth authority  
To settle this and that at boardroom tables;  
Sometimes they looked up and imagined him Morality,  
The silenced bishop of some heathen fables,  
The ruler of the See  
Of monstrous Anarchy.

Yet he found out at last the nature and the cause  
Of what was and is and he no more wanted <sup>(4)</sup>  
To avoid the ludicrous cheer, the sick applause -  
The sword of satire in his hand became blunted,  
And for the insincere city  
He felt a profound pity.

If I were pressed for a quick phrase with which to describe Aeneas, it would not be, like Jason, the 'Anti-Hero', but the 'Reluctant Hero', though not as Kavanagh's, who nevertheless, in the end, shows some glimmer of pietas when" .. for the insincere city/ He felt a profound pity.". Destiny apart, Aeneas is doomed to play the role he does because of his own character, because of his love of home and family and his sense of responsibility towards the extension of his family, his people, in other words, because of his great measure of pietas.

Let us at this point consider more closely the meaning and implications inherent in the words 'hero', 'heroic', 'heroism'.

'Hero', in the sense of main character within a particular novel, play or epic is fairly easy to define. It is commonly taken to mean the character or characters with whom the author sides, for whom he shows sympathy. Virgil shows sympathy for all. This does not mean that all his characters are saints, or that Virgil does not deplore, and intend the reader to deplore, the faults and vices of his characters - the selfishness of Turnus, the sadistic atrocities committed by Mezentius or the embittered saevitia displayed by Aeneas in the war in Italy. Nevertheless (unless it be Juno) there is no villain in the Aeneid; no human villain at any rate. No character, neither the most displeasing nor the most insignificant, forfeits, in Virgil's eyes, his inalienable right to sympathy and consideration. To each is given his due. His life, his hopes or sorrows are as important to him, to his family and friends as are those of Aeneas or Dido, Pallas or Camilla. Thus, in this sense, every character is a hero for all have the author's sympathy. Small wonder then, if some of the other major characters attract the reader's interest and affection as much as, or more than, Aeneas. To each reader his own temperament and preference. Despite this, there is no doubt in my mind that Virgil intended Aeneas to be the most important, the most complex and, in many ways the 'best' character in the Aeneid. Virgil's fairness to his other characters should not tempt the

reader to be unfair to Aeneas.

To revert to the definition of the meaning of 'heroism', there is also heroism in the sense of 'excellence', or what is worthy of our love and admiration. Here again Virgil shows great magnanimity in the variety and number of the virtues he depicts. There are all the traditional heroic/Homeric/epic virtues including courage in war, physical prowess, beauty, loyalty, generosity, nobility of demeanour, and these characteristics are not confined in niggardly fashion to a few characters but are widespread throughout the epic.

One notable characteristic of Homeric heroes, shown for example in Achilles and Ajax, is the refusal to take an insult or to allow any diminution of one's prestige or expectations and, resulting from this, the thirst for revenge when an insult or injury is inflicted. Both Dido and Turnus display this trait in large measure. While not withholding understanding for their feelings, nor recommending the pusillanimous, Virgil would clearly have considered magnanimity and forbearance more noble in Dido and acceptance of his lot more praiseworthy in Turnus. But this is not how they were made.

Homer shows pity for the casualties of war but Virgil's pessimism and compassion run much deeper. For Virgil it is an essential characteristic of civilized man to show compassion. When they see the episodes of the Trojan war sympathetically portrayed in the temple at Carthage, Aeneas says to Achates:

".... sunt hic etiam sua praemia laudi,  
sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt.  
solue metus;..." (I,461-3.) (8)

Virgil places great emphasis on the suffering entailed in the fulfilment of destiny and the founding of Rome. At the end of the introduction at the beginning of the Aeneid he says:

". . . . . iactatos aequore toto  
Troas, reliquias Danaum atque immitis Achilli,  
arcebat longe Latio, multosque per annos  
errabant acti fatis maria omnia circum.  
tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem. (I,29-33.)

It is not only of the wanderings of the Trojans that it can be said, "tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem". At the suffering and tragedy of each individual, the humiliation, sorrow and death of Dido and the grief of Anna, the drowning of Palinurus, the madness and suicide of Amata, the despair of Latinus, the death of Camilla, the fates of Nisus and Euryalus, of Lausus and Mezentius, the death of Pallas and the ensuing grief of Aeneas and Evander, the sorrow of all hurt by the war in Latium on either side, at the killing of Turnus and at the dedication and endurance of Aeneas one hears in the background "tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem". If the Aeneid had a chorus, this would be its refrain unless, like the chorus of Aeschylus' Agamemnon, it sang:

"αἴλινον, αἴλινον εἶπέ, τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω".

By the time one reaches the end of the Aeneid it is easy to forget that Aeneas has endured not one, but many, tragedies: the fall of Troy, the loss of Creusa, the parting from Dido and the subsequent knowledge that he is the cause of her suicide, the death of his father, of Pallas, of Palinurus and of many other friends and companions in battle. Because he is on the winning side he tends to be regarded as a victorious, triumphant and so, presumably, happy hero. Many readers feel no reason to pity him and a great desire to belittle him; but Aeneas, no less than Turnus or Dido, is a tragic hero, although he is a less conventional one. Dido, of course, best fits the classic Aristotelian definition of a tragic hero - her fault is minimal in proportion to the greatness of her disaster.

Turnus is, in many ways, the complete antithesis of Aeneas. Turnus has the qualities of the typical romantic epic hero. He is young (Aeneas is not) and he is completely self-centered and oblivious to the claims of everyone other than himself and, possibly, his beloved. In fact I wonder how much, if at all, Turnus loves Lavinia and how much she is merely a coveted prize to him. Lavinia is modest, beautiful, a king's daughter, but otherwise she is an entirely passive character. We know that Amata desired Turnus to be Lavinia's husband. Did Lavinia?

When Turnus considers his dignity outraged and his personal interests thwarted, he does not hesitate to call out his men to fight and die for his cause. He must have had many noble qualities to make him the most favoured of the Italian suitors and to enable him to muster the support he gains for his cause. In the latter he is, of course, aided by the natural xenophobia of the Italians and the flames of this hostility towards the Trojans are fanned by Juno (with Allecto) and Ascanius provides them with additional fuel for the conflagration when he kills the pet stag. (6) Nevertheless, the war is for Turnus' private gain.

In Aeschylus' Agamamnon this is what the chorus has to say about the people's attitude towards the expedition to recover Helen from Troy for Menelaus:

τὰ μὲν κατ' οἴκους ἐφ' ἐστίας ἄχη  
τάδ' ἐστὶ καὶ τῶνδ' ὑπερβατώτερα.  
τὸ πᾶν δ' ἀπ' αἴας Ἑλλάδος συνορμένους  
πένθεια τλησικάρδιος  
δόμῳ ἕκαστου πρέπει.  
πολλὰ γοῦν θλιγγάνει πρὸς ἦπαρ  
οὓς μὲν γὰρ <τις> ἔπεμψεν  
οἶδεν, ἀντὶ δὲ φωτῶν  
τεύχη καὶ σποδὸς εἰς ἑκά-  
στου δόμους ἀφικνεῖται.  
ὁ χρυσαμοιβὸς δ' Ἄρης σωματῶν  
καὶ ταλαντοῦχος ἐν μάχῃ δορὸς  
πυρωθὲν ἐξ Ἴλίου  
φίλοισι πέμπει βαρῦ  
φῆγμα δυσδάκρυτον, ἀντ-

ήνορος σποδοῦ γεμί-  
ζων λέβητας εὐθέτους.  
στένουσι δ' εὖ λέγοντες ἄν-  
δρα τὸν μὲν ὡς μάχης ἴδρις,  
τὸν δ' ἐν φοναῖς καλῶς πεσόντ' - ἄλ-  
λοτρίας διαί γυναικός''  
τάδε σῖγά τις βαῦζει·  
φθονερὸν δ' ὑπ' ἄλγος ἔρπει  
προδίοικις Ἀτρείδαις.

οἱ δ' αὐτοῦ περὶ τεῖχος  
θήκας Ἰλιάδος γᾶς  
εὐμορφοὶ κατέχουσιν· ἐ-  
χθρὰ δ' ἔχοντας ἔκρυψεν.

βαρεῖτα δ' ἀστῶν φάτις ξὺν κότῳ·  
δημοκράτου δ' ἀρᾶς τίνει χρέος.  
μένει δ' ἀκοῦσαί τί μοι  
μέριμνα νυκτηρεφές.  
τῶν πολυκτόνων γὰρ οὐκ  
ἄσκοποι θεοί. κελαι-  
ναὶ δ' Ἐρινύες χρόνῳ  
τυχηρὸν ὄντ' ἄνευ δίκης  
παλιντυχεῖ τριβᾶ βίου  
τιθεῖσ' ἀμαυρόν, ἐν δ' ἀίστοις  
τελέθοντος οὔτις ἀλκά'

(Aeschylus, Agamemnon, 427-67).

This is superbly, if not literally, translated by Louis MacNeice in his poetic translation<sup>(8)</sup> as follows:

Such are his griefs in his house on his hearth,  
Such as these and worse than these,  
But everywhere through the land of Greece which men have left  
Are mourning women with enduring hearts  
To be seen in all houses; many  
Are the thoughts which stab their hearts;  
For those they sent to war  
They know, but in place of men  
That which comes home to them  
Is merely an urn and ashes.

But the money-changer War, changer of bodies,  
Holding his balance in the battle  
Home from Troy refined by fire  
Sends back to friends the dust  
That is heavy with tears, stowing  
A man's worth of ashes  
In an easily handled jar.  
And they wail speaking well of the men how that one

Was expert in battle, and one fell in the carnage -  
But for another man's wife,  
Muffled and muttered words;  
And resentful grief creeps up against the sons  
Of Atreus and their cause.  
    But others there by the wall  
    Entombed in Trojan ground  
    Lie, handsome of limb,  
    Holding and hidden in enemy soil.

Heavy is the murmur of an angry people  
Performing the purpose of a public curse;  
There is something cowed in the night  
That I anxiously wait to hear.  
For the gods are not blind to the  
Murderers of many and the black  
Furies in time  
When a man prospers in sin  
By erosion of life reduce him to darkness,  
Who, once among the lost, can no more  
Be helped.

This passage is also appropriate to the Aeneid for, if it has not been for Helen, Troy would not have been destroyed and there would be no Trojans in Italy to threaten Turnus' interests.

It is a moot point whether Turnus was formally engaged to Lavinia, and Latinus broke his word, or whether Turnus was only the presumed fiance because he was the most eligible of the Italians and strongly supported by Amata. Turnus certainly considers that he has a right to Lavinia. Apart from the open encouragement of Amata for the match, Latinus is greatly indebted to Turnus for help and support in his kingdom and it would not be unreasonable for Turnus to hope for, or expect, Lavinia as his bride in return. When Amata says to her husband:

"quid tua sancta fides? quid cura antiqua tuorum  
et consanguineo totiens data dextera Turno?" (9)

we already know that, aware of his father's oracle, Latinus is unwilling to betroth his daughter except to a foreigner. Can Amata's statement mean that Latinus has on many occasions promised his daughter to Turnus? Surely once is enough for a formal betrothal and the hand that has so often been proffered is a token of friendship. This might encourage Turnus' hopes but it does not formally confirm them.

Whether or not he was formally betrothed to Lavinia, and however guilty he may be of the deaths of those, whom, like Pallas he killed, or those, who, like Camilla, came to support him, Turnus fate is still a sad one. Virgil's sympathy for unmerited suffering is often cited. It is a fallacy, and not one in which, I think, Virgil believed, that undeserved suffering is more painful than deserved suffering. Deserved retribution may be less unjust (and so hurt the reader less) but it is no less painful to the sufferer. In fact, if anything, it may be worse. Dido's sense of shame and humiliation formed a

considerable part of her suffering at the departure of Aeneas.

Aeneas has often been equated with Augustus; I wonder how much there is of Virgil in him. In so far as Virgil chose Aeneas to be the central figure of his epic he must have exercised great thought and imagination in the creation of his character within the framework of the development and treatment of the legend in the Aeneid.

Qualities which appear to be common to Virgil and Aeneas are: pessimism or melancholy, pity, a finely developed conscience or pietas, a love of home - for Aeneas Troy, or the hope of refounding Troy in Rome, for Virgil the life of the country and, for both, a longing for what is necessary for the enjoyment of home life, peace.

Before I elaborate this statement I should like to look at a problem which I think has often been a hindrance to the proper understanding to the portrayal of Aeneas as the hero of the Aeneid: namely that he is both a public and a private hero, both individual and ordinary human being and leader and man of destiny. He has something of both romantic hero and saintly hero, of the hero with whom we identify ourselves and the hero whom we worship. It is more usual, and much easier, to portray a hero in one or other of these categories to the virtual exclusion of the other. To one accustomed to these traditional categories and the ensuing conventions it seems, for example, an outrage that a lover should for a moment consider anyone or anything of greater importance than his love and it is disturbing, not to say frightening, to have to consider that a leader, a 'hero' or 'god' might be subject to emotions which might conflict with his mission or weaknesses or uncertainties which might detract from his efficiency. To explore and portray, as Virgil does, the tensions between these two facets of human nature is more truly realistic and more tragic.

The unhappiness caused by this internal conflict is a price paid by Aeneas, and by many others, in the fulfilling of destiny. It would be nice to think that those who are successful, at least as far as others are concerned, are happy but it is not necessarily true.

When Aeneas is first introduced to us in person it is in a storm at sea and he says:

" o terque quaterque beati,  
quis ante ora patrum Troiae sub moenibus altis  
contigit oppetere! o Danaum fortissime gentis  
Tydide! mene Iliacis occumbere campis  
non potuisse tuaque animam hanc effundere dextra,  
saevus ubi Aeacidiae telo iacet Hector, ubi ingens  
Sarpedon, ubi tot Simois correpta sub undis  
scuta uirum galeasque et fortia corpora uoluit!" (10)

At once the melancholy and the nostalgia for Troy. Another interesting sidelight on Aeneas' pessimistic attitude to life is his comment to Anchises when he sees the souls that are about to drink of Lethe and be born again:

" o pater, ane aliquas ad caelum hinc ire putandum est  
sublimis animas iterumque ad tarda reuerti  
corpora? quae lucis miseris tam dira cupido?"(11)



The nostalgia for Troy is very strong in Aeneas. In Book III, when taking leave of Andromache and the rest of her group of Trojan survivors, he says:

"uiuite felices, quibus est fortuna peracta  
iam sua: nos alia ex aliis in fata uocamur.  
uobis parta quies: nullum maris aequor arandum,  
arua neque Ausoniae semper cedentia retro  
quaerenda. effigiem Xanthi Troiamque uidetis  
quam uestrae fecere manus, melioribus, opto,  
auspiciis, et quae fuerit minus obuia Grais." (12)

Here is a longing for home, with no home to go to, nor even, as yet, a land in which to begin to build one. To Dido, when under stress of emotion, Aeneas blurts out the tactless truth:

"me si fata meis paterentur ducere uitam  
auspiciis et sponte mea componere curas,  
urbem Troianam primum dulcisque meorum  
reliquias colerem, Priami tecta alta manerent  
et recidua manu posuissem Pergama uictis." (13)

Fortunately he does not explicitly state the logical conclusion of this wish, namely, that under these circumstances he would never have come to Carthage or had the opportunity to meet Dido. It is ironical that two of the many things Dido and Aeneas had in common were exile and the loss of a much loved partner. It is in his account to Dido of the sack of Troy and his subsequent wanderings that Aeneas describes his foolhardy return to Troy in his desperate search for Creusa.

In carrying his father and their gods and holding his son - what arm had he left for Creusa? - Aeneas loses his wife and in shouldering the burden of his destiny (as pietas demands) for his son's sake as much as, or more than, for his own he parts from Dido. As Jupiter says to Mercury:

"Si nulla accendit tantarum gloria rerum  
nec super ipse sua militur laude laborem  
Ascanione pater Romanas inuidet arces?" (14)

How different is Aeneas' parting from Creusa's ghost from his parting from Dido. Creusa understands and forgives, if forgiveness is necessary, and her parting words are:

"iamque uale et nati serua communis amorem." (15)

Dido hates and curses.

If ever a man could be said to have a fatal virtue as opposed to a fatal flaw or ἀμαρτία, then Aeneas' pietas is this fatal virtue. He is deaf to all the pleas of Anna and Dido because,

"fata obstant placidasque uiri deus obstruit auris." (16)

Aeneas is as surely chained by his pietas as any Old Testament prophet under

divine compulsion. Jonah is probably the most flamboyant in his attempts to avoid fulfilling the divine command and in his anger with God for the indignities he allows his prophets to suffer. Jeremiah is more serious and more poignant. Even the most reluctant prophet is forced to admit that there is no avoiding the divine command. As St. Paul says, much later, "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"(17)

Aeneas, with full experience already of the horrors of war, loathes the prospect of a war in Latium. Turnus and the leaders on the other side are ravening for war despite all Latinus' pleas. However, once in the fight Aeneas displays an extraordinarily vicious saevitia which is horrifying and repulsive to behold and quite different from Turnus' hot-headed and youthful violentia. Aeneas kills with furious speed and energy. The etymology of saevus is doubtful but the suggestion that it means "roused to fierceness" as opposed to ferus meaning "naturally fierce" fits my feeling that Aeneas' saevitia is the result of embitterment, the sudden explosion of fury. After enduring not one, but many, griefs and much hardship the need to fight another war, one which he might reasonably have hoped to avoid, is too much. His consuming hatred of those who declared war on him is well shown in his treatment of Tarquitus, one of the many sad, minor characters who enter the scene only in order to darken it by their death:

"tum caput orantis nequiquam et multa parantis  
dicere deturbat terrae, truncumque tepentem  
prouoluens super haec inimico pectore fatur:  
'istic nunc, metuende, iace. non te optima mater  
condet humi patrioque onerabit membra sepulcro:  
alitibus linquere feris, aut gurguti mersum  
unda feret piscesque impasti uulnera lambent.'" (18)

This conduct may seem inexcusable but it is at least understandable human behaviour. Aeneas is, after all, only an ordinary mortal. This, I think, is the point of Aeneas' return from the underworld through the Gates of Ivory. The symbolism points forward to the rest of the Aeneid, not back to the events of Book VI. It shows that, despite the vision he has been granted during his visit to the underworld, Aeneas returns an ordinary mortal, not a god, and thus is accompanied by, and will still be subject to, false dreams and illusions, fallibility of judgement and flaws of character.

Yet even in the bitterness of this war Aeneas can be moved to pity. Love of his child is a very strong emotion in Aeneas, as is love of his father and love for the child entrusted to him, Pallas. Love of Pallas is what, dramatically and emotionally, seals Turnus' fate. By contrast, the filial piety of Lausus and the parental grief of Mezentius break through Aeneas' blood-curdling saevitia and arouse his compassion.

The killing of Turnus is both a manifestation of Aeneas' saevitia, his embittered fury at the sight of Pallas' belt, and a manifestation of his pietas in feeling such a strongly protective and possessive love for the child entrusted to him.

The death of Turnus is both a political and a dramatic necessity. Dramatic, partly, because Turnus deserved to die. It is not only the death of Pallas for

which Turnus is responsible but the deaths of all those undeservedly involved on either side. Dramatic necessity, too, because it ends the poem on a note of sadness with an emphasis on the wastefulness of death and the unhappiness demanded by the founding of Rome. Nor could Turnus be imagined living vanquished and accepting defeat; unlike Aeneas he must die "before his vision become the slightest bit tame".

It is a political necessity that Turnus should die because, as Machiavelli so skilfully puts it, it is more merciful to kill one or two <sup>(19)</sup> who will instigate rebellion than to let them live and risk the lives of many.

It is difficult to avoid asking such questions as "Was Aeneas justified in placing Rome before all else?" or "Was the Roman Empire worthy of the great sacrifices it demanded?". Also, how far do the judgements of modern historians differ from Virgil's opinion of Rome?

The ideal vision of Rome's mission as depicted, for example, in Book VI was never realised either before or after Augustus and I do not think that Virgil can seriously have believed that Augustus had it in his power to initiate the perfect kingdom. An era of peace, of comparative stability and with improved standards of justice in the treatment of allies and provinces, yes, but the return of the Golden Age, no. It is hard to believe that the man who wrote the First Eclogue could have many illusions about the hard realities of government or the difficulty of reconciling conflicting interests. In the famous passage "excudent alii..." <sup>(20)</sup> it is noticeable that Virgil states that other races will excel the Romans in achievement in artistic and intellectual pursuits but he does not state that the Romans will in government, he uses the imperative to express the hope that they will:

"tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento  
(hae tibi erunt artes), pacique imponere morem,  
parcere subiectis et debellare superbos."

Is it possible that Virgil is addressing Augustus here and saying "These will be your arts - if you choose to pursue them, and many hope you will"?

I do not think that the Aeneid is, as some have considered it, an uncritical panegyric of Rome written to flatter Augustus. It is an inspired study of the cost to individuals of founding and advancing the cause of a great state. It is a challenge to Augustus and the people of Rome that they should not allow the suffering of the past to have been endured to no purpose but that they should strive to make Rome a little less unworthy of those who had struggled to make her great.

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I am grateful to Mrs. A.C. Griffiths of Kings College, London for pointing out in the discussion at the end of the meeting that the choice of subjects depicted on Aeneas' shield at VIII, 626-728 could be taken as an indication by Virgil that the history of Rome was far from faultless. Is there irony then in the final lines of Book VIII:

Talia per clipeum Volcani, dona parentis,  
miratur rerumque ignarus imagine gaudet  
attollens umero famamque et fata nepotum."?

NOTES

1. This statement is qualified by the following note: "In Jason's favour, in addition to his successfulness, it must be admitted that he often reveals the qualities of a true gentleman: cf. his good deed in carrying Hera across the Anaurus (3.66-73), his diplomatic handling of his men and his democratic spirit, and finally, his handsomeness, eloquence and charm over women. In these respects he is representative of the cultivated man of the Hellenistic Age and would command the sympathies of a contemporary audience."
2. Patrick Kavanagh, Collected Poems. MacGibbon & Kee, 1964.
3. cf. Aeneid II, 796 - end.
4. cf. Georgics II, 490.
5. Unless otherwise stated all future references are to the Aeneid.
6. Juno & Allecto, VII, 288ff., Ascanius and the stag, VII, 475ff..
7. Aeschylus, Agamemnon, 427 - 468. Text, Denniston & Page, Oxon 1957.
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20. VI, 847 - 858.