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City of God(s):
Virgil and Augustine[1]

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Why talk to the Virgil Society about Augustine, Doctor of the Church, bishop and theologian? The membership card declares that the purpose of the Society is 'to unite all those who cherish the central educational tradition of Western Europe. Of that tradition Virgil is the symbol.' For Augustine, Virgil certainly symbolised the central educational tradition of the Roman empire in which he lived, and Virgil also shaped his understanding of his own experience. Sabine MacCormack, in her long-awaited book on Virgil and Augustine, calls him 'undoubtedly Vergil's most intelligent and searching ancient reader'.[2] There are questions to be raised about that judgement; and we cannot know about all the intelligent and searching ancient readers whose responses to Virgil do not survive. But of all Virgil's ancient readers known to us, it is Augustine who tells us most about the experience of reading Virgil, and therefore makes modern readers think about theirs.[3]

If there had been a Virgil Society in Carthage in the late fourth century CE, Augustine would have been a member. He had invested much time, and his parents' money, in Virgil. Education did not come free: parents in the later Roman empire paid for their sons, and sometimes their daughters, to acquire the 3 Rs and some evidence of literary culture.[4] Quintilian said that the teacher's task was the correct use of language and exposition of the poets.[5] Three centuries after Quintilian, 'correct' language was still Greek as Demosthenes used it or Latin as Cicero used it, and 'the poets' meant above all Homer in the Greek-speaking east and Virgil in the Latin-speaking west. Virgil became a school classic almost at once, like Seamus Heaney in the late twentieth century. At school, Augustine learned how to read a text that was much less helpful than a modern book, with line-breaks but without word-divisions or punctuation: there are fine examples of Virgil texts dating from Augustine's own lifetime or soon after.[6] He learned to hear Virgil's metre that was so different from the accentual rhythms, the *cursus*, of everyday Latin. This was especially difficult for Romans from North Africa, he observed, because their speech did not differentiate long and short vowels.[7] He learned to interpret vocabulary and cultural allusions from a time that was as far from his everyday world as Shakespeare's is from present-day students, who also find it hard to hear verse.

What did the *grammatici*, the secondary teachers of the late antique world, do in their Virgil classes? The commentary of Servius, who was probably Augustine's contemporary, seems very familiar to present-day readers who have had a traditional classical education.[8] Servius asks whether we are reading the correct text, or whether it should be emended. He discusses why Virgil uses a particular word, and what he means by it, on the assumption that the best way to find out is to consider Virgil's usage in other works, or to compare the usage of other classical authors. He explains references to people and rituals and other allusions. Some teachers, according to Augustine (*De ordine* 2.12.37), took this to extremes, asking 'what was the name of Euryalus's mother?' But they were expected to know all the answers: 'we are annoyed with a master who cannot answer some question of detail, rather than thinking it is Virgil's fault that he has nothing to say' (*de utilitate credendi* 13). Commentary, then as now, allowed for displays of learning. Augustine's contemporary Jerome, who (as he often remarked) was taught by Donatus, challenged the scholarship of an opponent by listing commentaries. No doubt Rufinus has read Asper on Virgil and Sallust, Vulcatius on Cicero's speeches, Victorinus on Cicero's dialogues and on Terence, Donatus on Virgil, and the commentators on Plautus, Lucretius, Horace, Persius and Lucan?[9]

Augustine complained (*Conf.* 1.18.29) that in his own education, a mistake in grammar or a false quantity brought greater disgrace than a moral lapse did, and Servius lends support to this claim by frequently using Virgil as the occasion for a discussion of grammar. Robert Kaster observes, in his illuminating book on late-antique *grammatici*, that Virgil is almost incidental to Servius' purpose, which all too often is to tell his pupils 'Virgil does this, but you mustn't.'[10] (There is some resemblance to the legendary schoolmaster: 'Boys, this term you are to have the privilege of reading the *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles, a veritable treasure-house of grammatical peculiarities.') But Servius did not always ignore the hard questions about religion and morality. He asked, for instance, what we are to think when Virgil, at the outset of his poem, calls Juno *saeva*, 'savage'. How can she be *saeva* when her name comes from *iuvare*, 'to help'? Is this an archaic use of *saeva* to mean 'mighty', as in Ennius, or does Virgil mean that in this context the Trojans experience her as *saeva*?[11]

Robert Kaster's work shows the impact of the *grammatici* on the Roman educated elite. It was not just a matter of flaunting Virgil like an old school tie,[12] or of displaying shared cultural capital, as in the British parliamentary debates of the earlier nineteenth century, when everyone was expected to recognise a Virgilian tag. (Chris Stray reports sceptical comments that the great majority of these nineteenth-century quotations came from *Aeneid* 1. This may help to explain why the uneducated diviner Albicerius, known to Augustine, could usually identify the line of Virgil that someone had in mind: there may not have been many lines that were widely familiar.[13]) In their study of Virgil, students taught by *grammatici* developed an acute awareness of words, their associations, and their impact, and this awareness could have the same practical importance as a present-day politician's choice of a phrase or a slogan. Present-day students taking classical degree subjects are assured that their communication skills equip them for almost any job. They are not told that if they cannot effectively deploy their culture and their persuasive arguments, a human life may be lost, a family reduced to poverty, a city devastated by rioting or punitive taxation: but when Augustine was at school, that could have been true. The readers of Virgil, as members of the educated elite, might have to convince or mollify the local representative of imperial government as he sat in judgement, and it helped if he could be made aware that the person trying to persuade him belonged to the same cultural club.[14]

Augustine's family belonged, precariously, to that local elite. His father was prosperous enough to be a city councillor, one of those who had to take unwelcome responsibility for the local budget and the imperial tax bill, but not so prosperous that it was easy for him to fund Augustine's education. This was a major investment for a family with other children, and the expectation was that Augustine would make a career in the imperial civil service, as a legal advisor. Instead, he became a teacher of rhetoric, first in Carthage where he was himself a student, then in Rome, then in the imperial capital Milan, where he had a publicly funded chair. His *Confessions* discuss this phase of his life, but none of his extant writings come from it. Everything comes from the time after he abandoned his career and his intended marriage for a life of prayer and study, which in turn became a life of pastoral work as priest and bishop.[15] From his immense range of philosophical and theological writing, there follow a few examples of how Augustine read Virgil at different times in his life.

The first passage comes from one of his earliest extant works, dated to 386 when he was 32. It is from a philosophical dialogue *Against the Academics*, which challenges the philosophical scepticism that says we cannot know anything for certain.[16] Augustine is heavily indebted to Cicero for information and for the style of a philosophical dialogue. *Against the Academics* takes place in the *otium*, the civilised leisure, of a country estate. As Peter Brown comments, the setting and the company is less distinguished than Cicero's: the group includes 'a pious old woman, two uneducated cousins, and two private pupils, aged about 16'.[17] The country estate, a little villa at Cassiciacum, is borrowed from a friend, a *grammaticus* also from North Africa, and several modern scholars have been reminded of a reading party. Augustine had recently resigned his chair, waiting until the long vacation so as not to inconvenience his students; it was a relief, because his health had suffered from his heavy teaching load (*Conf.* 9.2.2). Cicero's (now lost) *Hortensius* had long since taught him that, after abandoning a public career, one should lead the philosophic life, living simply and quietly, pursuing wisdom and discussing it with congenial friends.[18] In the dialogue, Augustine's pupils discuss philosophy, debating difficult questions about wisdom and knowledge. They also read Virgil with Augustine, working through (*recensio*) books 2 to 4 of the *Aeneid*, with a lecture (*tractatio*) from Augustine when it was needed (*c.Acad.* 2.4.10); *tractatio*, as he explained elsewhere (*De Doctrina Christiana* 1.1) is a matter of finding out what we need to understand and giving expression to our understanding. Although he intended to seek baptism when he returned to Milan, he evidently did not think that Christian commitment required him to abandon Virgil. In these early writings, though never afterwards, Virgil is still *poeta noster*.

In his final retrospect on his writings, the *Retractationes*, Augustine said that in the works written before his baptism, he had abandoned worldly hopes but was still too much 'puffed up', *inflatus*, by his familiarity with secular learning.[19] This does not mean simply 'too much Virgil': Cicero is always the more pervasive influence in Augustine's work. But, unlike those nineteenth-century members of parliament, he knew all of Virgil, and in the range of his writings there are quotations from every book of the *Aeneid* and from the *Georgics* and *Eclogues*.[20] In the pre-baptism works, he does not constantly quote from or allude to Virgil. But Virgil comes to his mind with illustrations of a philosophical point, or with allusions and phrases that reinforce the sense of a culture that he shares both with his group of friends and with the expected audience for his book. (One of the challenges of present-day teaching is the absence of a shared culture: it is no longer possible to quote Shakespeare or the Bible and expect recognition.) *De ordine* supplies a striking example of Virgil as common ground:

Hic ego multo uberius cernens abundare laetitias meas, quam vel optare aliquando ausus sum, versum istum gestiens effudi: 'si pater ille deus faciat!' Perducet enim ipse, si sequimur, quo nos ire iubet atque ubi ponere sedem, qui dat modo augurium nostrisque inlabitur animis. Nec enim altus Apollo est, qui in speluncis, in montibus, in nemoribus nidore turis pecudumque calamitate concitatus implet insanos, sed alius profecto est, alius ille altus veridicus atque ipsa - quid enim verbis ambiam? - veritas, cuius vates sunt, quicumque possunt esse sapientes. Ergo adgrediamur, Licenti, freti pietate cultores, et vestigiis nostris ignem perniciosum fumosarum cupiditatum opprimamus. (De ordine 1.4.10)

Realising that my happiness was more lavishly abundant than I had even ventured to wish, I burst out with the line 'If God the Father grant it!' He who gives us the augury, who slips into our souls, will lead us, if we follow, where he tells us to go and to settle. It is not Apollo who is lofty, Apollo who in caves and mountains and groves is stimulated by rich incense and slaughtered cattle to take over madmen: no, another is the lofty truth-teller and (why use evasive words?) truth itself, whose prophets are those capable of wisdom. Let us go on, Licentius, worshippers relying on faithfulness, and tread under our feet the pernicious fires of smouldering desires.

Augustine here speaks in a moment of religious emotion, and Virgil provides the words for his invocation of help from the Christian god: *sic pater ille deus faciat* (from Aeneas's response to Mezentius's challenge, *Aeneid* 10.875). Augustine's student Licentius, and others in his envisaged audience, can be expected to recognise the quotation and complete it: *sic altus Apollo*. This prayer to Apollo calls to mind another, Aeneas' prayer at Delos (*Aeneid* 3.88-9), which Augustine paraphrases in such a way that it remains immediately recognisable:

quem sequimur? quove ire iubes? ubi ponere sedes?
da, pater, augurium atque animis inlabere nostris.

Then he rejects the affirmation, *sic altus Apollo*, that he did not need to quote. For this purpose he adapts words and phrases from a third Virgilian prayer, again not quoted:

Summe deum, sancti custos Soractis Apollo,
quem primi colimus, cui pineus ardor acervo
pascitur, et medium freti pietate per ignem
cultores multa premimus vestigia pruna...

This prayer of Arruns (*Aeneid* 11.785-8) that his spear will hit Camilla is appropriated to proclaim the superiority of Christian over pagan faith.[21]

Many Christian writers of the late fourth century use the same tactic of appropriating Virgil for their purposes. It might be called 'supersessionist', by analogy with Christian appropriation of Jewish scripture. Virgil is the shared cultural capital, and they draw on him to affirm their own culture and to lend authority to their literary and doctrinal claims.[22] Prudentius and Claudian are well known examples; one of Augustine's pupils at Cassiciacum is less well known. Licentius, son of Romanianus who had helped to finance Augustine's education, is described in *contra Academicos* as over-excited by reading *Aeneid* 2-4:

quo tamen opere Licentius in poeticae studium sic inflammatus est, ut aliquantum mihi etiam reprimendus videbatur. (C.Acad. 2.4.10)

This work so inflamed Licentius' passion for poetry that I thought he needed a little calming down.

Licentius continued to be passionate about poetry. Almost a decade later he wrote Augustine a poem, in a style like that of Claudian, including several allusions to Virgil; but by then Augustine was concerned not with the merits of Licentius' language, but with his lack of commitment to the religious life.[23] His own experience must have helped him to understand why Licentius responded so intensely to Virgil, but his account of this experience comes from the *Confessions*, written a decade later and in quite different circumstances. When Augustine wrote the *Confessions*, he was a bishop; he was under personal attack from religious opponents; he wanted to acknowledge (Latin *confessus sum*) what God had done in one human life. Some readers of *Confessions* emphasise his attempts to counter the opposition, others emphasise his attempt to understand and to give thanks for what God has done.[24] His account of Virgil may be read from either perspective.

In book 1 of *Confessions*, Augustine challenged the priorities of his education. The basic books, those that taught him to read and write and count, were generally thought to be far inferior to Virgil, whose works are *honestiores et uberiores*: 'more respected, and there is more to them' (*Conf* 1.13.21). Augustine disagreed. Why commit to memory the wanderings, *errores*, of some man called Aeneas? The young Augustine feels *miseria*, wretchedness, for the adulterous Dido who dies of love when separated from Aeneas. But this is empty compassion: he shares the feelings of someone who does not exist. He himself is objectively *miser*, wretched, because he is separated from the love for God and is dying a spiritual death: but he fails to recognise the true object of love. In book 3 of *Confessions* Augustine returns to the question why people enjoy the sadness prompted by tragic drama, as he saw it performed in Carthage. Virgil perhaps shaped his awareness of Carthage as a city with a theatre,[25] since the theatre is so prominent when Aeneas sees Carthage being built with all ancient conveniences:

hic alta theatris
fundamenta locant alii, immanisque columnas
rupibus excidunt, scaenis decora apta futuris (*Aen.* 1.427-9)

Virgil was also dramatised at Carthage, and the evidence for this comes from Augustine: 'a few of you know from books, and many more of you from the theatre, how Aeneas went down to the underworld'.[26] This remark comes from a sermon. Augustine did not often use Virgil in preaching, and when he did, he was careful to explain what 'their' poet had said, distancing himself and his Christian audience from any expectation that they were classically educated. But his sermons use techniques of Scriptural exegesis that he had learned from the *grammatici* and as a *grammaticus* expounding Virgil. In his *tractationes* on the gospel of John, his *enarrationes* of the Psalms, and his regular preaching, he focused on words and phrases, and interpreted them with the help of other passages as if Scripture, like the works of Virgil, had a single author.[27]

Scripture, for Augustine, teaches truth, whereas Virgil offers fiction that instils false values and false beliefs. In *Confessions*, he also shows Virgil used for training in rhetoric, that is, for the effective marketing of falsehood and false emotion. Where Servius confronted the theological problem of *saeva* Juno, Augustine's teacher set a competition: who could best convey, in prose, the movement of her anger and resentment? This sounds like a promising topic, but Augustine, in retrospect, asked why society should reward a schoolboy for imitating such emotions (*Conf* 1.17.27). The language in which he discusses this episode confronts Virgil with Scripture by moving between the classical Latin of a late-antique education and the Biblical Latin that came from Hebrew by way of translated Greek. The

'essay title' for the rhetoric competition is almost a hexameter, *[dolentis quod] non posset Italia Teucrorum auertere regem*, a minimally adapted quotation from *Aeneid* 1.38, *nec posse Italia Teucrorum auertere regem*. The conditions for the prize are set out in a ponderous Ciceronian sentence,[28] such as the boys were expected to produce:

> *ille dicebat laudabilius, in quo pro dignitate adumbratae personae irae ac doloris similior affectus eminebat verbis sententias congruenter vestientibus.*
>
> The speaker who earned most praise was he who most closely expressed those feelings of anger and resentment, taking into account the status of the imagined character, and clothing the thoughts in appropriate language.

Then Augustine challenges Cicero with Biblical Latin: *ut quid mihi illud, o vera vita, deus meus?* For anyone who did not know the Latin Bible, *ut quid* would sound very strange: it is Hebrew idiom, followed by phrases that evoke the gospel of John.[29] Augustine continues in Biblical mode, but, as his translators have noted, Virgil reappears in his image of the young vine bearing worthless fruit for the birds to peck at:

> *Laudes tuae, domine, laudes tuae per scripturas tuas suspenderent palmitem cordis mei, et non raperetur per inania nugatorum turpis praeda volatilibus.*
>
> Your praises, Lord, your praises expressed through your scriptures could have propped up the vine-shoot of my heart, and it would not have been snatched away by empty trifles, 'a shameful prey for the birds'.

Turpis praeda volatilibus evokes Virgil's line *et turpis auibus praedam fert uva racemos* (*G.* 2.60). Virgil, who ensured that young Augustine did not bear fruit, supplies the language for promise spoiled. Perhaps also, as Philip Burton suggests, Augustine evokes Jesus' parable of the sower (Mt. 13.4), in which some of the seed fell beside the road, and birds came and ate it up.[30]

So Virgil, in *Confessions*, still provides words that express Augustine's experience. He also provides narrative structures. The undramatic travels of Augustine, from Thagaste to Milan, are analogous to the Mediterranean wanderings of Aeneas, also in half-understood obedience to the commands of a father-God. In the *Confessions*, at the harbour of Carthage, our hero tells lies to a woman who loves him (*Conf* 5.8.14). Secretly, on a journey prompted by God, he sails away to Rome, leaving her frantic with grief on the shore; and her grief displaces the future glories of Rome from the narrative.[31] But the woman frantic with grief is not Dido, who tried to obstruct the purpose of Jupiter: it is Augustine's mother Monica, who furthered God's purpose with her prayers even when she did not understand what that purpose was. Dido prayed at the shrines of pagan gods, and died; her prayers went unanswered. Monica prays at the shrine of St Cyprian, the martyred bishop of Carthage, and returns to her normal life; her prayers are heard. Augustine, unlike Aeneas, does not establish himself in Rome. Monica follows him and brings him back to his true home; her tears, and her piety, maintain the link even when he seems most distant.

In *Confessions* Augustine shows how far he has moved from his early passion for Virgil, and ensures that Scripture triumphs over Virgil. He does not express anguish that he is still imbued with Virgil, that he taught his own students Virgil, and that Virgil is still the basis of education. Jerome described a nightmare of being dragged before the judge (Jer. *Ep.* 22.30). Asked for his name and status, he declares, in the best tradition of the Christian martyrs, 'I am a Christian!' But the judge

replies 'You are lying: you are a Ciceronian.' Augustine does not record a nightmare vision 'you are a member of the Virgil Society'. He had found a solution in a book he began shortly before he wrote *Confessions*. The first two books of *Christian Teaching* (*de doctrina Christiana*) are concerned with the task of interpreting and explaining Scripture, that is, with the task Augustine had undertaken when he became a priest.[32]

What does a Christian *grammaticus* need to know? *Christian Teaching* draws a distinction (2.74) between human culture that requires a pact with other members of a human society, and superstition that requires a pact with demons. Language is an agreed system of communication among humans, and can be used for good or for bad purposes. If the words of magical spells are used performatively, to cast a spell, the speakers have made a pact with demons: but poets usually refer to magic rather than teach it. Augustine does not specifically mention Virgil, but it would be easy to conclude that neither Virgil, nor a student reading *Aeneid* 4, is actually communicating with demons. Reading or quoting the *Aeneid*, then, would be harmless evocation of shared human culture. There are no doubt more useful kinds of education than the classical education, but all human customs are imperfect. Moreover, there is Scriptural and Christian precedent for 'spoiling the Egyptians', that is, taking treasure from an idolatrous culture and reworking it for the service of the true God.[33] Augustine did not have to renounce all the expertise he had learned; Virgil could be used to reinforce a Christian message.[34]

In *Confessions*, Augustine reworked Virgil for his own journey from Carthage to Rome, but that city of Virgil and of classical tradition is strangely absent from *Confessions*. Evander gave Aeneas a tour of the city (*Aen*. 8.307-69), but there is no such tourism in Augustine: his two visits to Rome, both lasting several months, leave almost no trace in *Confessions* or in his other writings.[35] The title of this paper points to Augustine's most sustained engagement with Rome and with Virgil, in *City of God*.[36] It is often said that *City of God* is Augustine's response to the sack of Rome, in the year 410, by an army of Goths. This is not exact. His response to the Gothic sack comes in a small number of sermons preached in 410 and 411, when his major concern was not Rome, but the North African peace process. He was planning for the Carthage conference of 411 that might at last end terrorism and rioting between rival Christian groups in North Africa. In the sermons that address the sack of Rome, he says (as Francois Paschoud observed) what he always said in time of tribulation.[37] He starts from the readings for the day, and when he eventually reaches the recent disaster, he exhorts his congregation to get it into perspective. Terrible things have happened, innocent people suffered torture and rape and murder, but human history has known far worse: the Goths pulled out after three days and the city is still standing. Those who died are safe with God; those who survive should think about their sins. This latest horror is one more example of the great olive-press at work, leaving exhausted olive-lees but producing pure gold oil. What Augustine does not do, in sermons or in letters, is to reach for Virgil and cry out in anguish *urbs antiqua ruit, multos dominata per annos*. Jerome reaches for Virgil, juxtaposing Virgil on the fall of Troy with Isaiah on the fall of Babylon: but Jerome was writing to highly educated Christians who had personally suffered in the Gothic assault, and Rome was the city of his youth and his education.[38] Augustine was preaching, to anyone who came to church, and his interpretation was shaped by Scripture. He reached for Virgil in response to a request that he should speak to a different audience.

City of God is Augustine's response, not to the sack of Rome, but to the complaints of refugees from the sack of Rome. Several members of the Roman senatorial elite had fled south through Italy and Sicily. It was a short sea-crossing to Carthage, and they had land or friends in North Africa. So

Romans escaping from a devastated city found refuge in Carthage as Aeneas had done; and in this now Roman city that had once been Rome's greatest enemy, they argued that Rome had fallen at last because its gods were angry at Christian neglect. This was a centuries-old explanation for the inexplicable: 'no rain, blame the Christians' was proverbial (*CD* 2.3). Marcellinus, the imperial commissioner in charge of the peace process, asked Augustine for a rhetorically impressive response to the all too familiar arguments against Christian belief (Aug. *Ep.*138). Augustine took the opportunity to engage with Rome: not the late-antique city that, on the evidence of his writings, made so little impact on his life, but Rome to whom the gods had given empire without end, Rome the eternal city of history and culture. In *City of God*, this means Rome as it was constructed by a late-antique education. *City of God* is Augustine's most consistently Ciceronian book, whether his subject matter is ancient Rome or ancient Israel, Platonist philosophy or the evidence for miracles. He deploys Terence and Sallust, also key texts of the classical curriculum; he uses Varro for Roman religion, Livy for examples of Roman virtue and Roman disasters, Apuleius for philosophy.[39] But Rome, above all, means Virgil.

Augustine's preface to *City of God* begins with a magnificent Ciceronian sentence stating the purpose and scope of his book: to defend God's city against those who prefer their own gods to its founder.

> *Gloriosissimam civitatem Dei*[40] *sive in hoc temporum cursu, cum inter impios peregrinatur* ***ex fide vivens*** *(Hab.2.4), sive in illa stabilitate sedis aeternae, quam nunc* ***expectat per patientiam*** *(Rom.8.25),* ***quoadusque iustitia convertatur in iudicium*** *(Ps. 93.15), deinceps adeptura per excellentiam victoria ultima et pace perfecta, hoc opere instituto et mea ad te promissione debito defendere adversus eos qui conditori eius deos suos praeferunt, fili carissime Marcelline, suscepi, magnum opus et arduum, sed* ***Deus adiutor noster est*** *(Ps. 61.9). Nam scio quibus viribus opus sit, ut persuadeatur superbis quanta sit virtus humilitatis, qua fit ut omnia terrena cacumina temporali mobilitate nutantia non humano usurpata fastu, sed divina gratia donata celsitudo transcendat. Rex enim et conditor civitatis huius, de qua loqui instituimus, in scriptura populi sui sententiam divinae legis aperuit, qua dictum est:* ***Deus superbis resistit, humilibus autem dat gratiam*** *(Prov. 3.34). Hoc vero, quod Dei est, superbae quoque animae spiritus inflatus adfectat amatque sibi in laudibus dici:* ***parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*** *(Aen. 6.853). Unde etiam de terrena civitate, quae cum dominari adpetit, etsi populi serviant, ipsa ei dominandi libido dominatur, non est praetereundum silentio quidquid dicere suscepti huius operis ratio postulat et facultas datur (De Civitate Dei, praefatio)*
>
> The most glorious city of God, in this sequence of time, lives by faith among the impious, a foreigner among them. It now awaits in steadfastness, until justice returns in judgement, the security of its everlasting place, which it will achieve hereafter by its final victory and perfect peace. This city, my dear son Marcellinus, I have undertaken to defend, in this work promised to you, against those who prefer their own gods to its founder. The task is great and arduous, but God is our helper. I know what strength will be needed to convince the proud of the power of humility. This power exalts it above all the summits of this world: they sway in the instability of time, and it surpasses them not by human arrogance, but by God's gift of grace. For the king and founder of this city which is our theme has published the statement of the divine law in his people's Scripture: 'God withstands the proud but gives grace to the humble.' This prerogative of God is claimed for itself by the swollen pride of an arrogant soul, which loves to hear itself praised in the line 'to spare the conquered and beat down the proud'. So I must also speak of the earthly city, which seeks to dominate, but is itself dominated by the lust to dominate even while nations serve it. I cannot pass over in silence what this work requires, as the occasion offers.

This preface is as full of Scriptural allusions as the prayer in *De ordine* was of Virgilian allusions. Augustine directly confronts Scripture with Virgil as authoritative statements on the city of God and the city of this world. God's law is stated in Scripture: he withstands the proud but gives grace to the humble, *superbis resistit, humilibus autem dat gratiam*. But human pride claims this role for itself, and delights in hearing itself praised in the verse 'to spare the subject and fight down the proud', *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*. Writing for educated readers, Augustine need not name Virgil as author of this famous line, or Rome as the eager audience.

Augustine must, then, also discuss the city of this world, which is dominated by its own desire to dominate. It would be easy to conclude (and through the centuries many readers have done so) that pagan Rome is the city of this world, and the Christian church is the city of God. That conclusion would be reinforced by the opening chapter of *City of God*, which points out that many Romans have survived to attack the city of God only because they took refuge in its holy places, that is, in the churches of Rome that the Goths regarded as places of sanctuary. By the end of book 1 Augustine has made it clear that it is not so simple. Citizens of God's city, those who love God, live and work in the city of this world; there are citizens of the earthly city, those who love its rewards, who are members of the Christian church (*CD* 1.35). But in the opening chapters he moves straight from the sack of Rome to Virgil as representative of the earthly city's culture. Virgil is one of the authors so highly regarded that people will pay money to learn about them; indeed, they will give the teachers a salary from public funds and a respected status. Virgil in particular is thought to be the best of poets, and that is why children read him at an age when they will not forget him (*CD* 1.3).

City of God prompts the question whether Augustine really was, as Sabine MacCormack thinks, the most searching and intelligent ancient reader of Virgil. Augustine produces brilliant rhetorical challenges to Virgil on the gods of Rome, as he does to Livy on Lucretia and to Cicero on Regulus as models of Roman virtue. But he does not offer a reading of Virgil: he uses Virgil for another kind of rhetorical exercise, namely deconstructing the opponent's case. The same quotations recur like a damning admission made by an opponent: 'the Trojans carrying their conquered gods' (*Aen*. 1.67-8), 'all the gods left, abandoning shrines and altars' (*Aen*. 2.351-2). Is Augustine giving himself an easy target? He could reply that, for all those Roman citizens whose minds are still impregnated with Virgil read in youth, this is what Rome is. In Augustine's sermons on the sack of Rome, Rome is the Romans, the people who live in the city. In *City of God*, Rome is the construct made by its poets and historians and transmitted to those who read their works: to borrow a phrase from Brian Stock, this literature is the 'societal memory'.[41] Augustine said that he had to engage with the literature, because educated Romans kept quiet about Rome's disastrous history, and allowed the uneducated to think it was true that the gods had always protected them. 'I had to show, from the books their authors had written about past history, that it was far otherwise than they think' (*CD* 4.1). Virgil, as in all Augustine's writings after his early dialogues, is 'their' poet, their famous poet, their most famous poet (*CD* 5.12, 15.9). Virgil is therefore the authoritative spokesman for 'their' culture; that is how Augustine's near-contemporary Macrobius used him, setting in Rome of Augustine's time, perhaps in the very year Augustine first visited Rome, a philosophical dialogue in celebration of Roman tradition.[42]

Virgil is most prominent in the first five books of *City of God*, those that refute the claim that worship of the traditional gods brings worldly success. Augustine uses Virgil to reveal the truth about

Rome's conquered or neglectful gods, usually emphasising that he is quoting the very words of 'their' most famous poet. On one occasion, surprisingly, he does not take the opportunity to quote or mention Virgil: perhaps Virgil was so ingrained in his envisaged audience that he did not need to say anything, but usually he drove his point home. In *City of God* 2.4, Augustine describes the rites of Berecynthia as they were celebrated at Carthage when he was young. Virgil's Berecynthia, mother of all the gods, is used by Anchises as an image of imperial Rome and her offspring. She wears the turreted crown of a city goddess, and embraces all the other gods as she rides in her triumphal chariot through the cities of Phrygia:

> *En huius, nate, auspiciis illa incluta Roma*
> *imperium terris, animos aequabit Olympo,*
> *septemque una sibi muro circumdabit arces,*
> *felix prole virum: qualis Berecynthia mater*
> *invehitur curru Phrygias turrita per urbes*
> *laeta deum partu, centum complexa nepotes,*
> *omnis caelicolas, omnis super alta tenentis.* *(Aen. 6. 781-7)*

Augustine's Berecynthia is worshipped with obscene ceremonial that would disgrace any mortal mother:

> *veniebamus etiam nos aliquando adulescentes ad spectacula ludibriaque sacrilegiorum, spectabamus arrepticios, audiebamus symphoniacos, ludis turpissimis, qui diis deabusque exhibebantur, oblectabamur, Caelesti virgini et Berecynthiae matri omnium, ante cuius lecticam die solemni lavationis eius talia per publicum cantitabantur a nequissimis scaenicis, qualia, non dico matrem deorum, sed matrem qualiumcumque senatorum vel quorumlibet honestorum virorum, immo vero qualia nec matrem ipsorum scaenicorum deceret audire.* *(De Civitate Dei 2.4)*
>
> When I was a young man I used to go to sacrilegious shows and entertainments. I watched the antics of madmen; I listened to singing boys; I thoroughly enjoyed the most degrading spectacles put on in honour of gods and goddesses - in honour of the virgin Caelestis and of Berecynthia mother of all. On the yearly festival of Berecynthia's purification the lowest kind of actors sang, in front of her litter, songs unfit for the ears of even the mother of one of those mountebanks, to say nothing of the mother of a senator, or of any decent citizen; while as for the Mother of the Gods - ![43]

Yet, Augustine continues (2.5), her demonic power deceived Scipio, chosen by Rome as the best of Romans and worthy to receive her image. Should we conclude that Virgil too was deceived by demons, or that he knew he was telling lies? In one of the sermons he preached after the sack of Rome, Augustine imagined asking Virgil how he had come to claim that Jupiter gave Rome empire without limit, imperium sine fine, when nothing in this life is permanent. Virgil, he speculates, would answer 'Yes, I know, but I was selling words to the Romans and had to say what they wanted to hear. At least I made Jupiter say it rather than me: the god was false and the poet lied. And I did say elsewhere in my own person "not Roman state nor kingdoms doomed to die".'[44]

If Augustine's audience had asked naively 'Is Virgil true?' the answer could be 'Of course not, it's all invention', or 'yes, the *Aeneid* is a true representation of false gods and of misguided Roman belief'. Augustine attacks Virgil's poetry in *Confessions* because it is not true and in *City of God* because it is. In *Confessions*, the *errores* of Aeneas are analogous to the physical and spiritual *errores*

of Augustine, but in *City of God*, the *errores* are Virgil's. But perhaps *City of God* gives Virgil greater status because Augustine takes seriously what he thinks Virgil says. Virgil, who supplied emotion for the self-indulgence of the young, or fine words and phrases that can be reapplied without their contexts or even to refute their contexts, is now the authoritative source for Roman religion and for Roman sense of what it is to be Roman. Augustine contributed to Virgil's exceptional status in western tradition: of all Augustine's works, *City of God* was the most often and the most carefully copied.[45] But in *City of God* the cultural *imperium* of Virgil is like the *imperium* of Rome.[46] It is not god-given *imperium sine fine*: Virgil, like Rome, has no special place in the history of the world or in God's purposes, either as the vehicle of good or as the enemy of good. Virgil, like Rome, is a very impressive example of the flawed human culture that is all we can achieve on this earth since human pride first prompted disobedience to God's will. He is a spokesman for Roman tradition and for Platonist philosophy: and he is usually wrong. He thinks, for example, that passions come from the body, whereas Augustine thinks that the corruption of the body was the punishment, not the cause, of sin; and he is wrong about punishment after death.[47] As Augustine's book progresses beyond refutation of the claims of Roman gods, Virgil, like Rome, becomes less and less prominent. Rome is brought into perspective by other empires, and displaced by the story of ancient Israel; Virgil, like other Roman authors, is displaced by Scripture. The poet who shaped the experience of Augustine, and expressed the culture of Rome, is no longer very important.

Augustine, then, does not offer commentary on Virgil or new readings of Virgil, but he does offer a response to Virgil that is unusual in western tradition.[48] This response requires Augustine's readers to think about their own reading of Virgil in a culture that no longer shares Virgil's expressed beliefs about the gods, or empire, or love, or heroism. Do we read Virgil for the enjoyment of emotion that does not issue in action? Do we take seriously, to believe or to disbelieve, what Virgil says about life and death, human emotions and religion? Or do we read him for the delight and the reassurance of a shared culture, a Virgil society that can take from Virgil what it wants and for its own purposes?

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NOTES

1 My thanks to Jonathan Foster, who invited me to speak to the Virgil Society, and to Charles Martindale, who read a draft of the paper. Translations are mine unless otherwise credited.

2 *The Shadows of Poetry: Vergil in the Mind of Augustine* (Berkeley Ca., 1998), xv.

3 For readers of Virgil, see further P.Courcelle, *Lecteurs paiens et lecteurs chrétiens de l'Enéide* (Paris, 1984).

4 C.Dionisotti, 'From Ausonius' Schooldays? A Schoolbook and its Relatives', *JRS* 72 (1982) 83-125.

5 *Inst.Or.1.4.2: recte loquendi scientiam et poetarum enarrationem.*

6 M.B.Parkes, *Pause and Effect: an introduction to the history of punctuation in the West* (Aldershot, 1992).

7 *De doctr. Chr* 4.10.24; for a brief comment on the transition to *cursus*, see G.Clark (ed.) *Augustine: Confessions, Books I-IV* (Cambridge, 1995), 13.

8 D.Fowler, 'The Virgil Commentary of Servius', in C.A.Martindale (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil* (Cambridge, 1997), 73-8; R.A.Kaster, *Guardians of Language: the grammarian and society in late antiquity* (Berkeley Ca., 1988), especially pp. 169-97 on Servius.

9 Jerome, *contra Rufinum* 1.16 (PL 23.410); for his repeated references to 'Donatus, my instructor', see J.N.D.Kelly, *Jerome: his life, writings and controversies* (London, 1975), 11.

10 Kaster, l.c.

11 Cited by Fowler, 74.

12 The phrase is borrowed from Kelly, l.c.

13 C.A.Stray, *Classics Transformed* (Oxford, 1998), 66. Albicerius: Augustine *c.Acad.* 1.6.18, with W.Klingshirn, 'The figure of Albicerius the diviner in Augustine's *Contra Academicos*', *Studia Patristica* XXXVIII (Leuven, 2001) 219-23.

[14] Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (Wisconsin, 1992), especially 39.

[15] S.Lancel, *St Augustine* (English translation London, 2002), is a recent and sympathetic account.

[16] See further John Rist, *Augustine: ancient thought baptized* (Cambridge, 1994), 41-91. Rist translates the title *Contra Academicos* as *Against the Sceptics*.

[17] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: a biography* (rev.ed. London, 2000), 113.

[18] *Conf* 3.4.7-8; see further M.Testard, *Saint Augustin et Cicéron* (Paris, 1958), I.19-39.

[19] *Retr*. Prol. 3. Underlying *inflatus* is 1 Cor. 8.1, *scientia inflat, caritas aedificat* (a favourite quotation from Scripture, used e.g. *De Doctr.Christ*. 2.148).

[20] H.Hagendahl, *The Latin Fathers and the Classics* (Goteburg, 1958).

[21] Dr J.B.Stanfiel is developing, from his PhD thesis (*St Augustine's Platonic Sources as Intertexts*, University College London, 2001), work on Virgilian intertexts in Augustine.

[22] R.Rees (ed.) *Romane memento: Vergil in the fourth century* (London, fc) will be helpful here.

[23] Aug. *Ep*. 26 includes the poem; see further D.Shanzer, '*Arcanum Varronis iter*: Licentius's verse epistle to Augustine', *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes 37* (1991) 110-43.

[24] See further G.Clark, *Augustine: Confessions* (Cambridge, 1993; rev.ed. Bristol, 2004)

[25] See further Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990), 110-23; he comments (123) that a 'very high proportion' of the sermons in which Augustine discusses the theatre were preached at Carthage.

[26] *ser*. 241.5 (PL 38.1136). Augustine's sermons are brilliantly translated by Edmund Hill O.P. in the continuing series *The Works of St Augustine for the 21st Century* (Villanova, Pa), ed. John E.Rotelle OSA.

[27] Compare Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge, 1997), especially 76-96, on grammarians and (Greek) Christian exegesis.

[28] Cf. *Conf* 8.2.3, where the high status of the orator Victorinus is reported in a Ciceronian sentence adorned with quotations from Virgil.

[29] Jn 11.25 'I am the resurrection and the life', 14.6 'I am the way, the truth and the life'.

[30] P.Burton (tr.), *St Augustine: The Confessions* (London, 2001), ad loc.

[31] See further C.Bennett, 'The conversion of Vergil: the *Aeneid* in Augustine's *Confessions*', *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes 34* (1988) 47-69.

[32] *De Doctrina Christiana* is edited and translated by Roger Green (Oxford, 1995); see further C.Kannengiesser, 'The interrupted *De Doctrina Christiana*', in *De Doctrina Christiana: a classic of Western culture*, ed. Duane W.H.Arnold and Pamela Bright (Notre Dame, 1995), 3-13.

[33] *De DoctrChr*. 2.144-7; see further G.Clark, 'Spoiling the Egyptians: Roman law and Christian exegesis', in R.Mathisen (ed.) *Law, Society and Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2001), 133-47.

[34] MacCormack, 206-7.

[35] G.Clark, 'City of Books: Augustine and the world as text', fc in W.Klingshirn and L.Safran (ed.) *The Early Christian Book*. On Augustine's journey to Carthage, I differ from my distinguished contemporary Robin Lane Fox, who hears Scripture not Virgil (pers.comm.).

[36] See further G.O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God: a Reader's Guide* (Oxford, 1999), especially 246-8.

[37] F.Paschoud, *Roma Aeterna* (Paris, 1968) 240. The sermon now called *de excidio urbis Romae* is translated in E.M.Atkins and R.Dodaro, *Augustine: Political Writings* (Cambridge, 2001).

[38] Jer. *Ep*. 127.12-13, quoting Isa.15.1, Ps.78.1-3, *Aen*.2.316-5 and 369.

[39] O'Daly, 234-59.

[40] Ps.86.3: *gloriosa dicta sunt de te, civitas Dei*.

[41] B.Stock, *Augustine the Reader* (Harvard, 1996) 13.

[42] For December 17-19, 384, as the dramatic date of Macrobius *Saturnalia*, see Alan Cameron, 'The Date of Macrobius' *Saturnalia*', JRS 56 (1966) 28-9.

[43] Translated by Henry Bettenson, *St Augustine: City of God* (Harmondsworth, 1972)

[44] *Ser*. 105.7, quoting G. 2.498; the complete sermon is translated by Hill, op.cit., *Sermons* III.4.

[45] See the preface to the *Corpus Christianorum* edition (Turnhout, 1955).

[46] On the *imperium* of Virgil as a classic, see D.F.Kennedy, 'Modern receptions and their interpretative implications', in Martindale ed. (n.7 above), 45.

[47] *CD* 14.3, quoting *Aen*. 6.733-4; *CD* 21.13, quoting *Aen*. 6.735-42.

[48] This claim may need to be modified: at the Oxford Patristics Conference, 2003, Peter Burnell offered a paper on Augustine's reading (*CD* 19.12) of the story of Cacus (*Aeneid* 8. 190-305).