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**Hans-Peter Stahl, Poetry Underpinning Power. Vergil's Aeneid: The Epic For Emperor Augustus. A Recovery Study. Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2016. Pp. 500. Cloth (ISBN 978-1-910589-04-5) \$110.00.**

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Hans-Peter Stahl,  
*Poetry Underpinning Power. Vergil's Aeneid: The Epic  
For Emperor Augustus. A Recovery Study.*

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The name of Hans-Peter Stahl does not need an introduction among Classicists and Vergilian scholars, in particular. For decades Stahl has been battling with exponents of the so-called Harvard School, among others, over what he views to be the “correct” way to read Vergil’s poem. Is the *Aeneid*, as many modern critics who follow “present-day tendencies in literary criticism” (1) would have it, a rather dark poem, an elaborate work of subtle subversion and studied ambiguity which problematizes the role of the new ruler of the Roman world, Octavian Augustus, or is it, as Stahl argues, a straightforward eulogy of the princeps and the new Rome he had founded?

Stahl’s new monograph is his most recent attempt to settle the question in his favor. The strength of the contribution is that Stahl offers a textual analysis which is informed by his profound knowledge of Greek and Latin literature, archeology, and history. There is much that one can learn from this book. The weakness of the book is that it is overly polemic. He relentlessly takes on exponents of the “Harvard School” as well as scholars whose work is informed by New Criticism and Semiotic Theory with a tone that is overly sarcastic and condescending. His “adversaries” are quoted (often selectively and, often, in a misleading way) only to be ridiculed and belittled. He singles out some of their words in italics and often ends their quotations with exclamation and question marks. This all makes for a very unpleasant (and awkward) reading. And, I may add, cumbersome. Because of his constant quoting from other scholars’ work, the sentences are often broken and convoluted. When reading the book, one cannot feel but that Stahl is here settling old scores.

Stahl’s exploration of the *Aeneid*’s begins and closes with the epic’s final scene: Aeneas’ killing of Turnus. More specifically, in Chapter One (“Augustan Vergil and the Political Rival”), Stahl retraces Turnus’ actions in Books 11 and 12 and analyzes how Turnus in these last two books is depicted as a failed hero who lacks any heroic ethos. Turnus continuously and erroneously brags about his military exploits, he sabotages the peace-talks during the assembly of the Latins in Book 11 and is cowardly

reluctant to meet Aeneas face to face in Book 12. Turnus' confrontation with Aeneas in the final duel that brings the poem to an end shows more of the same, according to Stahl. In particular, Stahl reads Turnus' final speech to Aeneas as nothing more than an unheroic plea to save his own life, with Turnus shown to be willing to give up not only his political ambition but also to surrender his love in order to save his life (Chapter Two, "The Death of King Turnus"). The final chapter (Chapter Seven, "Allocating Guilt and Innocence, II: Turnus, the Impious Opponent") leads to the end of the poem by way of *Aeneid* 7, for here Stahl analyzes how Turnus is presented from the very beginning as nothing more than a sacrilegious rebel who was never betrothed to Lavinia ("a widely repeated misconception," 348) and who, by his own initiative, wages war against the Trojans. Building on what he had stated in Chapter Five in his discussion over Dido ("Allocating Guilt and Innocence, I: Queen Dido, the Liberated Widow"), where he discussed how divine intervention does not interfere with human actions but is just an externalization of a psychological process, he views Allecto simply as a poetic externalization "of (daytime) concerns that flare up again during sleep" (393). Turnus, and no one else, is therefore responsible for his actions. Turnus, and no one else, is responsible for a war which is nothing other than "Turnus' private war [fought] for his personal ambition, with no consideration of the possible cost in blood and sorrow to his misled people" (426). Chapter Three ("Aeneas the Warrior"), and Chapter Four ("Winning the Reader's Assent through Subliminal Guidance") further bring home the point. They center on Book 10 and analyze how Turnus' killing of the young hero Pallas and his triumphant donning of the sword-belt of his victim stand in opposition to the merciful behavior of Aeneas toward Lausus in the same book. The author argues that *Aeneid* 10 is so constructed as to guide the thoughts and emotions of the readers and prepare them for the final scene of the poem when Aeneas, at the sight of Pallas' belt, retreats from the road of clemency and kills Turnus. In sum, Stahl's reading presents us with a poem which heaps on his main hero, Aeneas, human virtue and sensitivity as well as the unearthly glow of providence, and depicts his political opponent as an "uninhibited egotist devoid of ethical and religious responsibility" (426). To create such a tidy picture, Stahl is sometimes forced to bend the reading of the text to make it fit his own narrative. For the sake of brevity, I cite just two examples. Do we, or better, can we really read Aeneas' simile comparing him to Aegaeon fighting Jupiter solely as a compliment to Aeneas' strength (137)? Should we really make nothing of the fact that Aeneas is associated in this simile to the Gigantic opposition to Jupiter? Can we really read Aeneas' sacrifice of prisoners in Book 10 as a pious act and can we

brush aside Livy's comment about human sacrifices "being highly un-Roman" as simply "an embarrassed whitewashing" (170)? Why (and of what) would Livy be embarrassed if human sacrifices were deemed a pious act of devotion in the age of Augustus, as Stahl seems to argue? In sum, I am not entirely persuaded by some of Stahl's readings. This study ultimately rests on a rather narrow political interpretation of the poem as a mere encomium of Augustus and is too quick to dismiss more complex readings of it as modern and unhistorical concoctions. Yet, Stahl's new book still has some very valuable insights and raises some important questions. Every Vergilian scholar should read it.

Chapter Six ("Before Founding Lavinium, Aeneas Inspects the Site of Rome [Aen. 8]"), which applies historical and archaeological data to the narrative of Book 8 and examines the possible political dimension of the tour that King Evander gives Aeneas, is the most successful chapter of the book, in my opinion. Here, Stahl is at his best. His research is meticulous and some of his findings make an important contribution. It is also worth noting that this is the least polemical chapter of the entire book. Here Stahl finally abandons personal attacks and focuses on the text. I wish he had done so all along.

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Stephen Harrison,  
*Victorian Horace: Classics and Class.*

New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. Pp. 217. Cloth  
(ISBN 978-1-4725-8391-8) \$114.00.

"Then farewell, Horace; whom I hated so," wrote Byron in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, "not for thy faults, but mine; it is a curse / to understand, not feel, thy lyric flow." Byron's weariness and his regret are alike symptoms of the outsized role played by the rote learning of Horace's poetry in elite 18th and 19th century education. And yet saying farewell is not so easy. As this charming new book by the distinguished Latinist Stephen Harrison amply shows, the vogue for Horatian poetry in England