Aeneid 5: Poetry and Parenthood

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Document Type
Book Chapter

Date of this Version
1999

Publication Source
Reading Virgil's Aeneid: An Interpretive Guide

Abstract
The main events and themes of Book 5 relate powerfully to the motif of generations. The hero holds memorial celebrations on the anniversary of his father's death; in the games that mark these celebrations, Trojan contestants are linked by their names and characters to the prominent Roman families that they will found; and the hero's son leads the other boys, who recall by name and appearance their distinguished Trojan ancestors, in a performance of what future Roman generations will call the "Troy game." The games of Book 5 are also notable for having occasioned at least one classic critical assessment in modern times of Vergil's epic technique vis a vis that of his greatest model, Homer; and in recent years, students of epic have come almost reflexively to figure the relationship between Homer and Vergil as one between father and son, full of anxiety and Oedipal overtones. Thus the dominant theme of the poetry itself finds its parallel in a leading theme of the critical discourse that has grown up around it. As a result, the fifth book of the Aeneid offers an ideal opportunity to study the mutually defining relationship between poetry and interpretation.

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Recommended Citation

Date Posted: 26 January 2017