Aeneid 5: Poetry and Parenthood

Joseph Farrell, University of Pennsylvania

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 à 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.

Copyright/Permission Statement
Posted with permission from the University of Oklahoma Press.

Recommended Citation

Date Posted: 26 January 2017

Aeneid 5 (Oxford 1960), on 5.858-9: 'Palinurus even in sleep does not relax his hold, so that the helm and a part of the ship are torn away with him.' 12 For the adjective primos in place of the adverb see Conington, J.-Nettleship, H., The Works of Vergil 4 (London 1884), online 858: they quote 1.723 (postquam prima quies epulis) and 3.69 (ubi prima fides pelago). 19 Cf. Putnam, M., The Poetry of the Aeneid (Cambridge, Mass. 1965) 76 and 97. Putnam compares the loss of helm and the helmsman with the accident to Gyas' ship in the naval race earlier in the Book (172-7).