

REVIEW

MEMORY IN THE *AENEID*

Aaron M. Seider, *Memory in Vergil's Aeneid: Creating the Past*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. x + 229. Hardback, £55.00/\$95.00. ISBN 978-1-107-03180-7.

This is an exciting project and a timely choice for a topic. Readers and reviewers alike will no doubt agree that studies of memory are essential to the Humanities today: it is enough to recall the rise in studies of collective memory of monuments, of forgetting and revisionism, and the growing dialogue of those studies with cognitive and behavioral science, and even with brain research. As for Vergil's *Aeneid* and memory, immediately after Seider's book it has been unveiled that a crucial new monument in the USA, the 9/11 Memorial at Ground Zero, had been designed to wear as a motto the English translation of *Aeneid* 9.447, a text about the everlasting memory of the immature deaths of Euryalus and Nisus. The tense debate about this choice and its implications would in itself form a fitting coda to Seider's monograph. Equally relevant, although less famous, is the publication of a book of poetry that requires attention from Classicists (see C. Hahnemann, *Arion* 22 (2014): 1–32), A. Oswald's *Memorial. An Excavation of the Iliad* (London, 2011), a song of epic memory where about 200 'minor' casualties of the battlefield in the *Iliad* are recuperated and listed, as if in one of those WWI memorials that are so common throughout Europe. The listing in a sense complements the first speech by the character Aeneas in Vergil's post-Trojan epic (1.94–101).

Seider's work would deserve and need a continuation in other respects too. The book has been designed as a follow-up to a Chicago dissertation, and when the work was in progress generous funding made available by Karl Galinsky encouraged a spate of new research, especially by junior scholars, about all conceivable aspects of memory in Roman culture and society. This book on the *Aeneid* is therefore intended as a participant in a wider discussion. However, the book does not show enough interest in some of the areas that could be brought into dialogue with literary interpretation, such as collective memory, monuments, and the Republican tradition, not to mention the evolution of research on Roman and Greek historiography and antiquarianism. What Seider accomplishes, instead, is a fine-grained and sensitive close reading of the entire poem. On the face of it, this seems like an impossible challenge, considering that the tradition of close reading has already generated so many memorable, and a few repetitive, studies of the *Aeneid* and its narrative

structure. Yet the power of the topic is such that a renewed continuous reading of the poem in terms of memory and its discontents does indeed produce fresh insights. In practice, the strong aspect in Seider's approach is that he writes not so much about memory, but more about the 'thematization' of memory within the narrative. This way, his book enables us to see at a glance the enormous importance of remembering, revisiting, and forgetting in the epic plot and in the actions and emotions of characters and narrators alike. This is a substantial gain for Vergilian studies, even if the main conclusion (199) sounds predictable: 'This book's central argument is that memory acts as a social and narrative mechanism for integrating a traumatic past with an uncertain future for both the narrator and Trojans alike.'

Like every successful book, *Memory in Vergil's Aeneid* creates connections with other research that has been published independently or later (and I apologize for the lateness of my own review). It would be interesting to see this reading combined with the recent copious literature on Augustan, but also Republican, monuments of Rome, their memorializing function, and their presence or influence within the texts of Augustan poetry. Equally important would be a link with recent research on *Fama* and its representation, for example in the recent book by Philip Hardie (*Rumour and Renown: Representations of Fama in Western Literature* (Cambridge, 2012)). The issue of Troy as a place of memory, frequently at stake in Seider's close reading of the text, makes a different and fresh impression if one keeps an eye on the impressive amount of material evidence on the monumentalization of Ilion recently made available by Charles Brian Rose (*The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Troy* (Cambridge, 2013) 217–37). Even the concept of trauma and post-traumatic disorder, which looms large at least implicitly in Seider's account of the Trojan memories in the poem, requires a new examination, if one is prepared to use this idea as a trans-historical tool of interpretation. Finally, Seider's approach to narrative memory suggests that a new examination of the *Aeneid's* relationship to tragedy and its ideology of memory would be in order—the way Virgil is being quoted and displayed in the 9/11 memorial site in fact suggests that the *Aeneid* is being viewed as an alternative and analogue to Greek tragedy, as well as a less polarizing substitute for the Bible in collective memory.

The monograph is well written and engaging. There are only a few problems with details, all of them (curiously enough for a book on memory) about old or imaginary place names: 'old men of Aurunca' (7.206, *Auruncos senes*); 'Latinus' city' called twice 'Latinum' (178 n. 63); 'a second Trojan Pergama' (91).