Review

KIRK FREUDENBURG, *VIRGIL'S CINEMATIC ART: VISION AS NARRATIVE IN THE AENEID*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. xiv + 182, illus. ISBN 9780197643242 (hbk); 9780197643266 (ePub). £54.00.

Comparative research between modern cinema and classical culture has generally flowed along two distinct streams: the representation of classical antiquity in cinema on the one hand, and the operation in ancient media of gazes, desires and anxieties comparable to those analysed in film on the other. The former is concerned with how and why sword-and-sandal films position their audiences ideologically in relation to Greece and Rome (e.g. Joshel, Malamud, Solomon, Wyke), while the latter is concerned with ancient media (novels, poetry, frescoes) as 'technologies of gender', expressing gendered relations of power in terms of feminist psychoanalysis, patriarchy and the gaze (e.g. Clover, de Lauretis, Mulvey, Silverman, Studlar). *Virgil's Cinematic Art* falls in neither of these two streams, which is both a significant strength and a limitation. It is a strength in that it allows Freudenburg to read closely what the *Aeneid* is doing visually in selected passages, in parallel to how camera shots work in mainstream cinema. These close readings are often sensitive and brilliant, considering not just what is happening in the mind's eye of the reader, but how this is accomplished through what Virgil does with the poetic resources of Latin. At the same time, it is a limitation in that these close readings are left without a sustained argument about what the *Aeneid's* visual techniques or 'gazes' (the aggregate of these techniques) are doing in relation to their political or gendered context, their Augustan 'ways of seeing'.

The volume opens with an introduction to how ancient epic can be compared to modern cinema, as both engage the listener, reader or viewer in the interactive creation of a co-imagined world parallel to the 'real'. A key concept is 'suture', the process of 'stitching' the viewer into the film's parallel world through camera shots that prompt the mind's recreation of a three-dimensional world from the necessarily two-dimensional images on screen. The viewer or reader is not passive, but rather an active participant 'in suturing the field and imagining the whole from the carefully arranged (visually manipulative) parts that they are given to see' (6). Suture thus establishes visual coherence, which in turn supports narrative coherence for film and ancient epic, of which the *Aeneid* is an example. This discussion of suture does not engage directly with the work of Christian Metz and leaves unexplored the desire (or conflicting desires) of the viewer with respect to visual and narrative coherence in the imagined world. There is thus no discussion of rupture or discontinuity in film, or the poetics of visual/narrative discontinuity in the *Aeneid* as a post-Hellenistic work. Hence F. establishes what is, for film theory and Latin poetry, a highly conservative orientation, aesthetically and ideologically: 'Throughout this book, it is my contention that the drive for visual coherence is just as urgent in the readers/listeners (interpellated as viewers) of ancient epic as it is in the spectators of modern narrative films' (11).

Perhaps inevitably, and certainly in a good way, F.'s close readings of visual and poetic technique in the *Aeneid* are richer and more nuanced than this interpretive groundwork. Through chapters on the Latin background to Virgil's approach to visual storytelling (focused on Lucretius and Catullus), the ecphrasis of Juno's temple and the 'camera's' treatment of Dido's entrance in book 1, the dense imagery of Dido's feast and descent into fiery passion at the end of that book, and Camilla's encounter with Chloreus in book 11, F. unpacks Virgil's 'cinematic art', again with 'cinematic' understood to mean how the *Aeneid's* manipulation of vision operates in similar ways to camera shots in film. Paired with close attention to the Latin, this produces some brilliant results. Of the simile comparing a swallow's flight to the ramble of Juturna and Turnus in his chariot in *Aeneid* 12.471-480, F. observes (24), 'Virgil's swallow-tracking hyperbaton [is] a miniature version of what we do when we process the visual workings of a narrative film. We pick up on pieces of information and make our way forward, scanning for further bits of information that we can use to fill gaps in our knowledge and make sense of the whole' (25). A similarly illuminating analysis in ch. 4 tracks Dido's transformation from captivating visual object to desiring (and doomed) subject through a series of visual artworks from late antiquity through the eighteenth century. As a final example in ch. 5, F. charts how Camilla's eyes follow Chloreus across the battlefield in mesmerised pursuit, as our eyes do across a text which, with Latin's compressed vocabulary and interlocked structure, is prone to ambiguity — intentional, ornate and seductive.

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At this point, the implications of F.'s close readings begin to exceed the interpretive scaffold meant to contain them. These implications are an invitation to revisit the discontinuous, the unsettled and the queer in contemporary film theory, and in the very structure of Virgil's Latin. As Derek Malcolm observed (*The Guardian*, 25 May 2000), 'Sternberg once said that he would not mind showing his films upside down because their justification was not the story, the screenplay or the acting but "the phenomenon of visual style". You could say that he wrote with the camera - and he often achieved poetry.' There is a tension in Virgil's visually charged words beyond narrative coherence, but not beyond the poetic, or the political. It may not go there, but *Virgil's Cinematic Art* points to the ability of feminist and queer film theory to explore this tension.

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