

Zitierhinweis

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PHILIP HARDIE (ed.), *Augustan poetry and the irrational*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, xiv+327 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-872472-8.

The book under review sets out to examine some of the manifestations of the irrational in Augustan poetry with a view to demonstrating to what extent they are a deep-rooted presence in both Roman thought and literature in the time of Augustus. Augustan poetry, despite the commonplace view of it as the product of an age of balance and rationality, a sort of ‘Age of Reason’ *ante litteram*, appears to be conspicuously permeated by the irrational, a force that was, indeed, controlled and repressed during that time, but never truly annihilated. Therefore, several of the Augustan texts that have come down to us let the irrational tellingly surface, for example when unruly or potentially dangerous emotions such as love, anger, fury are unleashed, thus infringing moral and social rules as a reaction to Augustan propaganda. Given that the volume’s title hints at E.R. Dodds’ famous study of *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951), of which classicists still lack a ‘Roman’ equivalent (cf. p. 3), this book, by seeking to fill a lacuna in the discipline, certainly serves a useful purpose. Moreover, it sets out to prove that the irrational (or the related concept of ‘failure of reason’), far from being a marginal or occasional presence, can be posited as a distinctive feature of the Latin canon of the Augustan period, usually labelled ‘classicism’. However, being a multi-authored proceedings volume issued from a conference, it displays – in a quite predictable way – an array of methodological approaches and a variety of styles that cannot guarantee the formal unity typical of a mono-authored book. Nonetheless, readers may rely on the introduction of the editor P. Hardie, who, while taking stock of the themes tackled by the contributors, also provides perceptive insights into the key concepts and questions raised by the main topic of the volume. The reading of Hardie’s introduction is thus highly recommended: being an essay-like paper rather than a summary of the volume’s contents, it fulfils more than just an informative function by establishing links between the papers and tracing a coherent interpretive path throughout the book. Hardie’s paper briefly touches, for example, on *Furor* as a veritable obsession for the Romans of Augustan Rome, owing to the dreadful evocation of past political violence and disorder it brought along (it inhabits or, rather, infests several moments of Augustan poetry, as in the close of Virgil’s *georg.* 4 or of the *Aeneid*); on erotic irrationality in elegiac poetry; on the interchange of Dionysiac and Apolline elements, which appears to be more nuanced than one may be led to suspect; on Lucretius as an impossible model for the Augustan poets to follow; on the irrational as

the only adequate, though unexpected, way of creating an ‘imperial sublime’; on literary female characters as figures of unreason, which brings the gender issue into play.

The volume is divided into five major sections, under which papers sharing themes or approaches are gathered. I think this makes sense overall, although it comes as a bit of a surprise that W. Fitzgerald’s contribution, revolving around Alexander Pope’s *Eloisa to Abelard*, is placed alongside papers dealing with Tibullus, Ovid and Propertius despite the presence of a unifying theme (‘Reason and Desire’) and the editor’s clarification of the label ‘Augustan’ in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England in the introduction (p. 1). Since P. Hardie’s paper too, in the close of the volume, deals with some aspects of reception, the editor might perhaps have considered devoting a specific section to this branch of studies.

The authors of the contributions are both leading experts in the field and younger scholars, which is indeed a praiseworthy choice. Papers offer discussions on the irrational in Augustan poetry from a variety of perspectives encompassing intertextuality, discussion of philosophical views on reason/unreason, analysis of the political and social life in the Augustan Age: this age, despite being just a fraction of the history of Rome, may certainly be taken as a representative illustration of the way the irrational came to pervade the literary and political discourse, thus questioning the role of values like measure and rationality traditionally attached to it.

Part 1 contains three papers revolving around the themes of civil war and the return of the repressed. E. Giusti (‘My Enemy’s Enemy is My Enemy: Virgil Illogical Use of *metus hostilis*’), after succinctly but effectively discussing the notion of *metus hostilis* in Roman thought and establishing new intertextual points of contact between some lines of Virgil’s poem and Aeschylus’ *Persians* (a welcome addition to the tragic texture of the poem already brought to light by scholars), focuses on the entangled relationship between Rome and Carthage: she discloses a complex assimilation of the two cities, which also blurs the distinction between Trojans, Carthaginians, Greeks and Romans. This is a very rich paper, having much to say, despite concision, about identity construction ‘in a whirlwind of shifting western-eastern paradigms’ (p. 55), which inevitably challenges any rationalizing principle underlying the Roman notion of *metus hostilis* (on the construction of the enemy, though not strictly speaking related to the problem of the irrational, cf. also U. Eco, *Inventing the Enemy and Other Occasional Writings* [transl. by R. Dixon], Boston/New York 2012). S. Rebeggiani (‘Orestes, Aeneas, and Augustus. Madness and Tragedy in Virgil’s *Aeneid*’) looks for (both visible and less visible) traces of Orestes’ character in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, presenting an ‘original argument’, to borrow the editor’s judgement (p. 6), that Orestes, as well as being linked to Aeneas, also represents a suitable model for Octavian to exact revenge for the murder of his father Julius Caesar.

Rebeggiani makes several good points on Orestean allusions in Book 2, 3 and 12 of the poem (*inter alia* he offers an interesting and, maybe, decisive interpretation of *Aen.* 3.332 *patrias ... ad aras*), also demonstrating very convincingly how Virgil innovates upon the motif of the hero's madness by creating a strong link between *furor* and vengeance: Orestes' actions come to embody a viable paradigm for both Octavian's and Aeneas' vendettas in light of their being divinely sanctioned. The first section is rounded off by a contribution of M. Labate ('The Night of Reason: the Esquiline and Witches in Horace'), who mainly focuses on the relationship between the irrational and some urban contexts of Augustan Rome in Horace. He argues that the site of the Esquiline in *sat.* 1.8 and *epod.* 5, in spite of the fact that it had been relandscaped by Maecenas as his residence and *horti*, at night time still retained disturbing features of its past owing to the witches' practice of black magic. Labate effectively shows how Horace's texts are, thus, capable of reactivating, through the evocation of the earlier squalor of the place, dark memories of death and violence.

Part 2 revolves around counting and accounts in relation to the opposition order/disorder in Augustan poetry. C.D. Haß ('Beyond "Cosmos" and "Logos": an Irrational Cosmology in Virgil, *Georgics* 1.231-58?') analyses the cosmological section of Verg. *georg.* 1.231-58 from a semiotic perspective bringing to the fore the underlying process of rationalization oscillating between *didaxis* and *poiesis* (although, in my view, his approach makes things a bit too complicated). J.P. Schwindt ('The Magic of Counting: on the Cantatoric Status of Poetry [Catullus 5 and 7; Horace *Odes* 1.11]') explores the function of counting based on the use of big or infinite numbers in the pre-Augustan poet Catullus, who famously toys in *c.* 5 and 7 with the confusion brought about by the *basia* he exchanges with his mistress Lesbia as a way to exercise control over the world of love. Schwindt then reads Horace's ode 1.11 against the Catullan backdrop, arguing that number plays are connected in Horace to oriental astrology and therefore banished, whereas the *carpe diem* is identified as a sort of rational principle entitled to confer measure to both life and poetry. E. Gowers ('Under the Influence: Maecenas and Bacchus in *Georgics* 2') concentrates on Virgil's *Georgics* 2, examining it as the product of a self-consciously irrational writer. She contends that the book's dedicatee, Bacchus, and Virgil's ideal reader, Maecenas, share common features and both have connections with the irrational. She also shows with persuasive arguments that Virgil's treatise on arboriculture puts on display two contrasting and yet complementary impulses, force and spontaneity, which refer not only to plant life but also to poetry and acculturation, a process, this one, not seldom entailing violence (cf. *georg.* 2.74-7).

Part 3 has its main focus on the duality of reason/desire and, as one may expect, especially revolves around elegy. J. Burkowski ('Apollo in Tibullus 2.3 and 2.5') looks at the way Apollo is portrayed in Tibullus' poems 2.3

and 2.5: these elegies, for all their proximity, offer two strikingly different representations of the god, an irrational Apollo consumed by love for Admetus in the *exemplum* of 2.3, a very dignified patron of poetry and prophecy in 2.5. Burkowski demonstrates how and to what extent Tibullus, in his double role of poet and lover, relates himself to Apollo, ultimately pointing out the distance between the god as naturally belonging to the universe of rationality and the elegiac lover as an inherently irrational creature. J. Fabre-Serris ('The *ars rhetorica*: an Ovidian *remedium* for Female *furor*?') devotes her attention to discussing the role of rhetoric in Ovid's amatory poems. After analysing some passages drawn in particular from Propertius and Ovid, in which female *furor* is presented as more dangerous than men's erotic passion, she insightfully argues that Ovid has come up with his own 'solution' to make women control their own *furor*, a solution that will turn beneficial both to themselves and to men: to this end, the poet endows the heroines of myth with the possibility of resorting to the *ars rhetorica*, as is well exemplified in some of the *Heroides* and in some episodes from the *Metamorphoses*, in which, as Fabre-Serris points out, women attempt to rationalize their situation. Let me just add a quick thought. I wonder whether the *ars rhetorica* granted to women proves effective in the end: given the general failure brought about by their rhetoric, it looks like Ovid did not really want to assign to women the 'right' *verba*, through which, on the contrary, men usually succeed in seducing, persuading or deceiving. W. Fitzgerald ('Augustan Gothic: Alexander Pope Reads Ovid') takes us forward in time to another Augustan age, that of English literature, offering a reading of Pope's heroic epistle *Eloisa to Abelard* and showing how Pope draws on Ovid's *Heroides* as the most suitable model, for a male poet, to give voice to a female character, also with a view to Gothicizing it. D. O'Rourke ('The Madness of Elegy: Rationalizing Propertius') investigates the duality of madness/reason throughout Propertius' corpus: he makes many good points about the poet losing control in his first three books as a result of acknowledging Cynthia as a centre of irrationality, which he then claims to have overcome at the end of Book 3. However, as O'Rourke argues, the alternation of erotic and aetiological themes that characterizes Book 4 is suggestive of the poet's difficulty of both sticking to the new rationalistic project announced in 4.1 and committing to philosophical wisdom as attempted earlier in the previous books, thus hinting at his relapse into irrationality.

Part 4 deals with philosophical and rhetorical issues related to the irrational. M. Citroni ('The Value of Self-deception: Horace, Aristippus, Heraclides Ponticus, and the Pleasures of the Fool [and of the Poet]') offers a rich set of insights into the theme of pleasure within Horace's moral discourse, emphasizing the rational awareness and control that the poet attaches to it: even the *carpe diem* motif, as also already emphasized by Schwindt in this volume, is strongly linked to the necessity of *sapere*. As

Citroni shows by bringing into the discussion *epist.* 15 and 17 and devoting special attention to the character of Maenius and to that of the philosopher Aristippus, Horace goes as far as to propose, also by means of self-irony, a rationalization of luxury, thus overturning traditional ethic views on it. Citroni then addresses, after quoting the anecdote of the man of Argos and his Greek sources, the related aspect of the *levis insania*, which consists of a balanced combination of (slight) unreason and normality and is also key to poetic inspiration. S. Heyworth ('Irrational Panegyric in Augustan Poetry') draws attention to the features of paradox, absurdity, excess, hyperbole in some passages of Augustan poetry having panegyric tone and content (especially in Virgil, Ovid and Horace) with a view to suggesting that, when poets appear to exaggerate, it is not just simply a matter of 'inspiration': they are driven to irrationality (and even lies) by the need or, rather, pressure to praise Augustus. Also, they do so by carefully exhibiting lack of reason in their praises (for a different reading of irrational praises on the part of the Augustan poets as the only adequate response to 'imperial sublime' cf. Hardie in the introduction, pp. 20-21; Max Weber's definition of 'charisma', cited at p. 20, as essentially opposed to rationality, is worth being recalled).

The volume is rounded off by Part 5 with two papers specifically revolving around Virgilian figures of the irrational. S. Clément-Tarantino ('*Caderent omnes a crinibus hydri*: the Problems of the Irrational in the Juno and Allecto Episode in *Aeneid* 7'), concentrates on Allecto's role in Book 7 of the *Aeneid*. After referring to the implausible description of how Amata is overcome by *furor* in the famous lines about the snake (346-56), which have long been the object of scholarly debate and criticism (on a possible model for the snake scene cf. also C. Battistella, 'Il serpente sotto il cuore', *Seminari Romani* 8, 2005, 311-16), she then goes on to discuss the deer hunt scene as the *prima causa* of the upcoming war in light of Tiberius Claudius Donatus' commentary. Donatus' interpretation, focusing on the countrymen's *furor*, seeks to explain and make sense of an (again) improbable scene (at least according to Macrobius' judgement): it posits that sort of *furor* as a natural type of *furor bellicus*, thus attempting to defend the consistency of Virgil's text. P. Hardie ('Adamastor and the Epic Poet's Dark Continent') comes back to the theme of *Fama* as the quintessence of irrationality, a theme that he has already thoroughly explored in his 2012 book. Building on the work of D. Quint ('The Epic Curse and Camões Adamastor', in *Epic and Empire*, Princeton 1993), he turns now to Vaz de Camões' poem *The Lusads*, which abundantly draws on Virgil's *Aeneid* as its main model, devoting special attention to the figure of the giant Adamastor and his connections with *Fama* from a densely intertextual perspective.

Before concluding this review, I would like to recall a passage that, despite hinting at an event of the pre-Augustan age and not being related to poetry, is quite indicative of how difficult exerting control over the irrational can be

for human beings, a condition that is also well reflected in the works of the Augustan poets discussed in this volume: in the famous account of Caesar's murder in Plut. *Caes.* 66.2, Cassius is said to have turned his eyes to the statue of Pompey to invoke him, although he was following the doctrine of Epicurus and, therefore, should have been immune to such forms of superstition: 'but the crisis, as it would seem, when the dreadful attempt was now close at hand, replaces his former rationality with inspired emotion (ἐνθουσιασμὸν ἐνεποιεῖ καὶ πάθος ἀντὶ τῶν προτέρων λογισμῶν; transl. by Perrin, slightly modified).

Overall, this volume has many merits and offers original and high-quality contributions. As a final remark, however, it has to be pointed out that editorial care is unluckily not at its best here (apart from the occasional typos, it should be noticed that, for example, translations in Heyworth's paper are confined to footnotes, which is not consistent with the criterion adopted in the rest of the volume). Also, I believe that readers would have certainly benefited from even just one paper devoted to exploring the theme of the irrational in Augustan art (on the *Ara Pacis* cf. briefly Hardie in the introduction, p. 16).

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