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More Than Shadows: Augustine's Enduring Engagement with Vergil

While an intertextual relationship between the *Confessions* and *Aeneid* has been identified, there remains a scholarly consensus that Augustine's use of Vergil in his later works was trivial. The accepted view is that Augustine virtually ignores classical Latin literature after composing the *Confessions* until he reacquaints himself with it in preparation for writing *City of God*. Thereafter he again ignores pagan literature.

Augustine is thought either to use Vergil as an authority in support of some argument, or to make references that are mere evidence of his own "mental furniture" (MacCormack, 1998, xviii; O'Donnell, 1980, 171; Hagendahl, 1967, 388-9). This paper argues that the scholarly consensus is not valid.

In support of this argument, I will examine intertexts from the *Georgics* and *Aeneid* in one of Augustine's last works, *Contra Julianum*, written in 421 when Augustine was 67 years old. It is Augustine's answer to a work by the Pelagian bishop Julian of Eclanum, a highly educated Italian of noble birth.. My analysis will show complex and highly significant intertextual relationships present in Augustine's work that indicate a profound engagement not merely with Vergil's content, but with his language and poetic themes.

This paper treats Vergilian references found in Augustine as intertexts: textual elements that the reader must know in order to understand the overall significance of a work of literature (Riffaterre, in Worton & Still, 1990, 56). Interpretations of the intertexts are based on a comparison of the original context of the referenced language with its context in the new work.

My analysis of intertexts in *Contra Julianum* will show that they introduce into Augustine's text richness and significance that escapes any reader who is not aware of the contexts of the referenced language. I will concentrate on three such intertexts, provided in a handout. *Aen.* 12.946-7 at *CJ* 3.17.32 turns Julian's theme of his theological conflict with Augustine as a Punic War of the mind (per Brown, 1967, 383) on its head. A reference to *Georgics* 3.468-9 at *CJ* 4.2.12 makes brilliant use of Vergil's own comparison of the consequences of plague with the consequences of *amor* (the subject of *Georgics* 3.209-283), very subtly appropriating Vergil's theme. Finally, I will consider Augustine's reference to *Georgics* 2.58-9 at *CJ* 6.7.21, which draws meaning from the referenced *Georgics* passage and further involves that text with another reference--to Paul's letter to the Romans (11.16-24) to create a highly condensed point concerning the necessity of infant baptism communicated only through recognition and comparison of the contexts of these intertexts.

My analysis of these intertextual relationships will demonstrate the nuanced nature of Augustine's engagement with Vergilian texts. The fact that such intertexts are present in a work composed by Augustine in his old age will challenge any conclusion that the bishop's involvement with Vergil, even at the end of his life, was trivial.