

Literary Impersonation and Vergilian Reception in the Ps.-Vergilian *Culex*

This paper focuses on the reception of Vergil in the Ps.-Vergilian *Culex*, a text that offers a unique perspective on refigurations of Vergil through its appropriation of his authorial voice. Composed in the reign of Tiberius (Güntzschel 1972), the *Culex* bridges the gap between poetic references to Vergil's works by his Augustan contemporaries and the tradition of his "epic successors" (Hardie 1993) and so offers a moment in which we can see the nearly immediate reception of Vergil's poetry. This paper will explore what was "Vergilian" about Vergil's poetry to an ancient reader of this period. To do so, I will analyze the *Culex*'s poetic persona and allusive structure.

The poem's 41-line proem offers an image of the young poet that foreshadows Vergil's three authentic works through adaptation of Vergilian metapoetic diction as well as elements of Vergilian literary biography. For example, the *Culex* is presented as a work for "Octavi" (1, 25) whose taste is worthy of epic: *posterius graviore sono tibi musa loquetur / nostra, dabunt cum securos mihi tempora fructus, / ut tibi digna tuo poliantur carmina sensu* (8-10). In these lines, the anonymous poet suggests that the *Aeneid* not only fulfills a long-standing wish for Octavian, but also paints the epic as the teleological aim of Vergil's literary efforts. The way in which the friendship between poet and ruler is foregrounded in the *Culex*-proem suggests that a literary relationship between Vergil and Octavian was a central feature of the Vergilian biography.

So, too, the narrative of the *Culex* (42-414) draws carefully upon each of the three authentic works, focusing on passages which resonate with a particularly Vergilian flavor. Some passages, such as Aeneas' *katabasis*, shape the poem's narrative (*Culex* 216-371), while others, such as *Eclogue* 6, infuse the text with crucial programmatic diction that keys the reader into the aims of the poet's literary impersonation (Janka 2005). A schematic overview of the *Culex*'s intertextual structure illustrates how, on both macro- and microtextual levels, the poet simultaneously compresses and expands the Vergilian content to present the reader with poem that is entirely new, yet surprisingly familiar. This selection of scenes, imagery and diction, I propose, reflects an editorial process indicative of the *Culex*-poet's engagement with the Vergilian poetic corpus. The *Culex* is, in effect, an epitome of the characteristic Vergilian poetic elements from the perspective of its anonymous poet.

Although reception within antiquity is often omitted from the purview reception studies (Hardwick 2003, Martindale and Thomas 2006), poetic responses to Vergil's works—from Numitor's *Antibucolica* to Horace's *Odes*—were immediate and wide-ranging; thus, the study of Vergilian reception begins in antiquity. As a distillation of Vergil's works into a literary prequel to the authentic poems, the *Culex* significantly expands our access to poetic responses to Vergil. By reading the text through the lens of Vergilian reception, we find a means, as Martindale suggests, to uncover "unexplored insights" into Vergil's literary tradition in 1st c. CE, and in particular during the Tiberian period from which little is extant.