

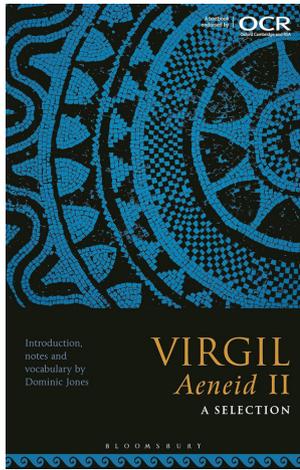
Book Review

Virgil: Aeneid II. A Selection

Jones (D.), Pp. viii + 159. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. Paper, £16.99. ISBN: 9781350156470.

Zara Binji

Merchant Taylors' School, Northwood, UK
ZLB@mtsn.org.uk



One of the latest additions to the OCR-endorsed Bloomsbury Collection, Jones' *Aeneid II: A Selection* covers the prescribed lines of Virgil's set text for A level examination in 2025 and 2026. With the volume being aimed at any student who has 'conquered the language as far as GCSE' (p. vii), it claims to offer suitability and accessibility for those beginning their A Level studies, and not only those sitting their examinations imminently. Supplementary to Jones' edition is a selection of online Bloomsbury resources (see p. viii), aimed at both teachers and

students. Whilst the specific merits of these resources are omitted from the scope of this review, broadly speaking, these comprise worked examples and printable texts for teachers (Bloomsbury login permitting), and interactive quizzes and questions (open access) for students. Though the student resources may well complement Jones' edition, one assessing 'The Helen Episode' of 2.567–588 stems beyond the prescribed lines of text (ending at 558), and thus the inclusion of this as a primary exercise is intriguing.

To compile a concise introduction to Book II would present a sizeable challenge to anyone, and Jones copes well with balancing descriptions of the plot's events in breadth, and closer analysis of specific episodes in depth. Focusing his approach to textual analysis on the skill of 'practical criticism', Jones lists a range of questions (pp. 25–28) a reader may ask of the text, from macro-level (e.g. How many sentences are there?) to micro-level (e.g. is there any meaningful ambiguity?). Whilst these serve as a useful reminder as to the enhanced literary criticism demands between GCSE and A level, and certainly have the potential to conjure up meaningful observations from students, they are perhaps more useful as guiding questions in the context of a class discussion, rather than for independent study.

The key triumph of Jones' introduction is no doubt his treatment of specific permeating motifs within Book II, his 'snakes and fire' section (pp. 15–18), which demonstrates the extent to which

continuity and change are conspicuous hallmarks of Virgil, being especially successful. Similarly, his discussion of the various tenors and vehicles within the book's similes (pp. 19–21) is impressively comprehensive. Such inclusions are perhaps more in line with the observations candidates ought to be making when tackling 20-mark questions, and will be useful to raise with students when practising these. As a minor point, in terms of precision within the commentary, on p. 12, Jones speaks of a 'subjective narrative for the poem's middle third' in reference to the Sinon episode, when it appears that his description corresponds instead with Book II's middle third.

Returning to the question of this volume's accessibility, it is clear that Jones has taken pains to ensure that his critical points are clear. His individual observations lean more towards grammatical analysis than literary criticism, though this is to its merit, as it does provide scope for students to make more extensive observations of their own. Asterisked are any references within the line-by-line commentary to specific literary techniques, glossed on pp. 28–31. Naturally some comments will be clearer towards the end of the A level than at its advent (especially explanations of case uses), though Jones' formatting is no doubt helpful in preparing prospective undergraduates for the type of commentary skills needed later on. As is standard for these volumes, there is a comprehensive vocabulary list at the end, with AS Defined Vocabulary items asterisked.

Also comprehensive is Jones' treatment of place names and character names, successful in contextualising the narrative's geographic scope. Yet this strength also uncovers a noteworthy oversight from the volume: its presumption of a reader's familiarity with, and ability to read, Greek. Whilst perhaps an appropriate approach to the construction of university level commentaries, it is perhaps an ambitious expectation for incoming A level students. As one of numerous examples of this, *πελώριος*, defined as 'awe-inspiring' (p. 103, on II.476), is given as an epithet of Periphas. Being a minor character most likely unfamiliar to students, the transliterated English at the very least may have been useful, if not an etymological or narratological explanation as to how such epithets and terminologies came into being.

Jones does a strong job of clarifying more difficult vocabulary items, offering sensible suggestions which may go against a student's typical understanding of a particular word. At times, his offerings are somewhat colloquial or idiomatic, though not to the detriment of a section's overall syntax. Also pleasing is his acknowledgement of some of the *Aeneid's* overarching values within his commentary, his comment on *pietas* in relation to line 430 (p. 97) one such example of this. As with most of his comments, although brief (*pietas* being explained as 'the predominant attribute which Aeneas strives for throughout the poem'), it is enough of a hint to prompt additional in-class discussion, which no doubt, teachers will deem essential.

For those not unfamiliar with A level set text teaching, Jones' offering provides the accustomed comfort one might expect from the Bloomsbury-endorsed selection. Despite its limited two-year shelf life, it is a comprehensively helpful introduction to the *Aeneid* from both a cultural and literary standpoint. Perhaps more useful to be used as a starting point rather than a crutch, if supplemented with additional teacher notes and thematic discussions, Jones' volume is one that no doubt has the potential to serve its students very well.

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