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Ennius. Virgil is echoing Callim. *Hymn* 4.180 γείτονος αἰθομένοιο (itself echoing Hom. *Il.* 21.523 ἄστεος αἰθομένοιο), also in the context of an enemy incursion.

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# HERCULES AND THE STONE TREE: *AENEID* 8.233–40

In ancient literature and religion, Hercules—in common with many other deities—is frequently associated with particular trees or types of tree. There are tales connecting him with the wild olive,[1] laurel[2] and oak,[3] but his most prominent and frequent arboreal link is with the poplar (*populus Alcidae gratissima*, 'the poplar is most delightful to Hercules', Verg. *Ecl*. 7.61),[4] an association mentioned twice in the Hercules-heavy first half of *Aeneid* Book 8 (276, 286).[5] The festival of Hercules celebrated by Evander and his people takes place just outside the city within a 'great grove' (*Aen.* 8.103–4) of unspecified species, in an area surrounded by less defined expanses of trees. Trees crowd the banks of the Tiber, leaning out for wonder as Aeneas' fleet passes by (*Aen*. 8.91–2) and soon *uariisque teguntur | arboribus, uiridisque secant placido aequore siluas* ('[the Trojans] are covered by different trees and cut their way through green woods on the calm water', *Aen*. 8.95–6); looking up through the sacrificial smoke on the altars, Pallas and his friends are initially frightened *ut celsas uidere rates atque inter opacum | adlabi nemus* ('as they saw the tall ships glide towards them through the dark grove', *Aen*. 8.107–8). When Evander later shows Aeneas around, the emphasis on trees recurs, with the huge grove destined to become Romulus' Asylum (*Aen.* 8.342), and the bramble- and god-haunted woods of the Capitol (*Aen*. 8.347–54). Later, Aeneas and his men camp in a vast grove of Silvanus, as Venus approaches to bring her son his new shield (*Aen*. 8.597–607).

This catalogue of woods and trees serves to emphasize the importance of the wooded landscape in general and of poplars in particular both to this part of the *Aeneid* and to its

[1] E.g. [Theoc.] *Id.* 25.208–10; Plin. *HN* 16.240; Paus. 2.31.10, 5.7.7. Pindar, by contrast, connects Heracles with the cultivated—not wild—olive at *Ol.* 3.13.
[2] Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.40.1.
[3] Plin. *HN* 16.239.
[4] Cf. Theoc. *Id*. 2.121; Verg. *G.* 2.66; Ov. *Her*. 9.64; Phaedrus, *Fab*. 3.17; Plin. *HN* 12.3; Paus. 5.14.3.
[5] The appearance of Tiberinus from amongst poplar branches (*Aen*. 8.31–2) is fitting enough for a river god, but may also glance forward to the importance of the tree's better-known patron as the book progresses. See further R. Armstrong, *Vergil's Green Thoughts: Plants, Humans, and the Divine* (Oxford, 2019), 131–4.

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temporary hero Hercules. The point of this note, however, is to explore a rock, not a tree; but it is a rock with arboreal pretentions.

Within Evander's tale of Hercules and Cacus, there is an interesting prominence of bare rocks and stone, which frequently seems to take on the dominance more often afforded to woods in the surrounding narrative.[6] The hillside in which Cacus' cave is located is emphatically rocky: *iam primum saxis suspensam hanc aspice rupem,* | *disiectae procul ut moles desertaque montis* | *stat domus et scopuli ingentem traxere ruinam* ('first look at that crag hanging from the stone cliff, how the boulders are scattered wide about, the house on the mountain stands deserted and the cliffs have toppled down in vast ruin', *Aen*. 8.190–2). It is soon explained that the fractured, ruined quality of the scene is not that of just any age-worn mountainside but a result of Hercules' exploits. There is a poignant—if not unsettling—resemblance to the crumbling walls of Troy torn apart by the gods, ***disiectas moles*** *auulsaque saxis* | *saxa* ('the scattered boulders and stones torn from stones', *Aen*. 2.608–9), but also to the city's fall as seen through simile in the toppling of an ancient manna-ash: *uulneribus donec paulatim euicta supremum* | *congemuit* ***traxit****que iugis auulsa* ***ruinam*** ('until, gradually conquered by its wounds, it groaned its last and, torn up, stretched out its ruin on the hillside', *Aen*. 2.630–1).[7] The ruin of the mountainside evokes not just other scattered stones but perhaps also a fallen tree; this hint, I argue, will soon be strengthened.

Up on the mountainside, Cacus' cave itself is *inaccessam* (*Aen.* 8.195), impenetrable to the sun's rays, echoing Virgil's original coinage of the adjective to describe Circe's inaccessible groves (*Aen.* 7.11): a faint arboreal connection is made again. Cacus drags Hercules' cattle backwards in his attempt to avoid detection, and hides them *saxo ... opaco* (*Aen.* 8.211, 'inside the dark rock'), a dark cave now taking the place of dark woods.[8] Woodland makes a brief actual reappearance as Hercules' stolen cattle bellow, filling the groves with their noise (*Aen.* 8.215–16, echoed by the people's enthusiastic response to the hymn to Hercules at 8.305), but the setting soon becomes high and rocky once more as Hercules and his club climb the mountain to reach the cave into which Cacus swiftly retreats. The monster, making use of his father Vulcan's arts, has a great rock suspended by chains which he now releases in order to block the entrance. Having tried various attacks on the *saxea ... limina* ('stone entrance', *Aen.* 8.231–2) without success, Hercules finds an outcrop of stone (*Aen*. 8.233–40):

[6] This is not to argue that woods and rocks are necessarily mutually exclusive—indeed, elsewhere in *Aeneid* Book 8 they can be found in ominous combination: *lucum ingentem ...* | *et gelida ... sub rupe Lupercal* ('a huge grove and the Lupercal beneath the chilly crag', 8.342–3); *iam tum religio pauidos terrebat agrestis* | *dira loci, iam tum siluam saxumque tremebant* ('even then terrible religious awe of the place terrified the cringing country folk, even then they trembled at the wood and the rock', 8.349–50).

[7] This simile is evocative of the Homeric pattern of hero-falls-like-tree: e.g. *Il.* 4.482–9, 13.177–81, 14.414–17, 16.482–4. See P. Gagliardi, 'L'albero e il guerriero: funzione e storia di un topos omerico', *Silvae di Latina Didaxis* 8.20 (2007), 5–42. In the death of Bitias, Virgil returns to a kind of fractured analogy between stones, trees and people: compared earlier along with his brother to a tall oak tree (*Aen*. 9.679–82), when Bitias comes to die, his fall is not like a tree but like a stone pile, *sic illa* ***ruinam*** | *prona* ***trahit*** ('so it falls prone, stretching out its ruin', *Aen*. 9.712–13). On gigantomachic elements here, see P. Hardie, *Virgil's* Aeneid*: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford, 1986), 143–6.

[8] Virgil does not reserve the adjective *opacus* and its related verb *opaco* only for woods, but it is nevertheless true that he applies them particularly frequently to dark clusters of trees in the preceding sections of the *Aeneid*: 6.136, 195, 208, 283, 673; 7.84; 8.107.

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stabat acuta silex praecisis undique saxis
speluncae dorso insurgens, altissima uisu,
dirarum nidis domus opportuna uolucrum.
hanc, ut prona iugo laeuum incumbebat ad amnem,
dexter in aduersum nitens concussit et imis
auulsam soluit radicibus, inde repente
impulit; impulsu quo maximus intonat aether,
dissultant ripae refluitque exterritus amnis.

There stood a sharp flint outcrop, its stone sides sheer all round, rising up from the ridge of the cave, incredibly high to look at, a welcome home for the nests of ill-omened birds. It was leaning down from the ridge towards the river on its left, so bracing against it on its right side he shook the pinnacle and tearing it up by its deepest roots loosened it, then suddenly pushed it; at this push the great sky thundered and the banks leapt apart and the terrified river flowed backwards.

The ecphrastic nod in the opening *stabat*[9] allows the rock a certain narratological as well as narrative prominence, putting the reader in mind of other descriptive pauses for awesome sights.[10] The outcrop's height and, especially, its usefulness as a nesting site seem particularly arboreal,[11] with a link to the numinous underworld trees implied through the birds' description as *dirae*.[12] The connection between Cacus' cave and the underworld will be made more strongly through the simile of *Aen.* 8.243–6,[13] but the hint here of a kind of petrified reflection of underworld flora is suggestive. The tree link recurs and gains texture as Hercules topples the rock, which is *imis* | *auulsam ... radicibus* ('torn up from its deepest roots', *Aen.* 8.237–8).[14] The great stone falls like the falling Troy-tree (*auulsa*, above), or still more like the toppling Entellus who keels over, *ut quondam caua concidit aut Erymantho* | *aut Ida in magna radicibus eruta pinus* ('as once on Erymanthus or Ida a hollow pine tree fell, plucked out from the roots', *Aen.* 5.448–9).

The fall of this tree-like rock thus hints at the Homeric warrior-falls-like-tree simile but at one remove.[15] Notably, Cacus himself receives no epic simile on his death, vainly belching fire as Hercules throttles him (*Aen.* 8.259–61), perhaps in a move to deny him a

[9] The verb seems later particularly to appeal to Ovid in his arboreal *ekphraseis*: *stat uetus ... silua* (*Am.* 3.1.1); *lucus* | *stabat* (*Am.* 3.5.3–4); *stat uetus ... lucus* (*Am.* 3.13.7); *silua uetus stabat* (*Met.* 3.28); *stabat ... quercus* (*Met.* 8.743); *stabat ... ficus* (*Fast.* 2.253); *silua uetus ...* | *stabat* (*Fast.* 4.649–50).

[10] See Hardie (n. 7), 113–16 for a reading which places more emphasis on Hercules' feat of strength in toppling the rock in the first place.

[11] Once thinking along these lines, a pun between *silex* and *ilex* feels tempting if probably also fanciful. The combination of birds nesting and that nesting site toppling also brings to mind the grove-cutting scene of the *Georgics*: *et nemora euertit multos ignaua per annos,* | *antiquasque domos auium cum stirpibus imis* | *eruit; illae altum nidis petiere relictis* ('[the farmer] toppled the groves which stood idle through many years, and overturned the ancient homes of the birds together with the very roots; the birds made for the heights, leaving their nests behind', *G.* 2.208–10).

[12] See in particular the great elm with its roosting dreams at *Aen.* 6.282–4, introduced with the still more emphatically ecphrastic *in medio*. Admittedly, a further connection here is with the monstrous Harpies, potential *dirae uolucres* (*Aen.* 3.262; cf. 3.210, 228, 235), whose habitat seems at least as much the rocks as the trees (rocks: 3.225, 229, 245; woods: 3.258, and 3.230 if it can be reclaimed from editorial excision on the grounds of interpolation from 1.311).

[13] See R.O.A.M Lyne, *Words and the Poet: Characteristic Techniques of Style in Vergil's* Aeneid (Oxford, 1989), 128–9.

[14] The metaphorical uprooting of things which have no roots in the biological sense is of course perfectly common, but poets like Vergil are more than capable of reanimating 'dead' metaphors.

[15] On the simile type, see n. 7 above.

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simile's potential for pathos and humanization.[16] It may be, further, that the toppling of a tree-like rock rather than of an actual tree also enables Hercules to retain his credentials as a tree-hugger, not a tree-cutter.[17] Naturally, it remains open for readers to decide whether they feel any more comfortable about overweening violence brought against rocks which seem a bit like trees than they do about violence towards actual trees,[18] but a straightforward episode of tree violation is at least avoided.[19] At any rate, with the close of this episode, suggestive rock-woods and rock-tree give way to the understated but actual *lucus* in which the Ara Maxima is established (*Aen.* 8.271–2), and Evander wreathes his brows with Hercules' own white poplar leaves, marking both the hero-god's triumph and the reinstatement of trees and woods as dominant features of the landscape now free of the fire-breathing, rock-dwelling monster.

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## AN ACROSTIC IN *AENEID* 11.902–6*

Very shortly before the end of Book 11 of the *Aeneid*, Turnus, hearing of Camilla's death, is forced to abandon his ambush in order to fall back to the city. Just after he leaves the wooded gorge, Aeneas passes through it unscathed with his company.

[16] In contrast with the death of the Minotaur, whose fall like that of a great tree (Catull. 64.105–9) evokes sympathy. Apollonius' Talos may provide a still closer connection here in a combination of monstrosity, rocks and trees: the giant bronze man keeps his enemies away in classic giant style by casting boulders, but, brought low by Medea's evil eye, he falls like a great pine tree, uprooted and making an enormous crash (*Argon*. 4.1677–88).

[17] On an intriguing painting of Hercules actually hugging a tree, see A. Hunt, *Reviving Roman Religion. Sacred Trees in the Roman World* (Cambridge, 2016), 224–6. Nevertheless, as the anonymous reviewer rightly observes, in his choice of weapons to use against Cacus, Hercules combines both rocks and trees: *ramis uastisque molaribus instat* ('he attacks with branches and great mill-stones', *Aen.* 8.250). Here a Virgilian stone-based hapax legomenon alludes to a Homeric hapax legomenon (*molaris* = μύλαξ, *Il.* 12.161), which may subtly emphasize the priority of rocks in this moment even while undeniably drawing in tree branches too. On the hapax legomenon, see J. Wills, 'Homeric and Virgilian doublets: the case of *Aeneid* 6.901', *MD* 38 (1997), 185–202, at 194–5. On the broader ambiguities of the presentation of Hercules in the *Aeneid*, a helpful summary (together with particular interpretation) is offered by L. Morgan, 'Assimilation and civil war: Hercules and Cacus, *Aeneid* 8', in H.P. Stahl (ed.), *Vergil's* Aeneid*: Augustan Epic and Political Context* (Swansea, 1998), 175–98.

[18] Intuitively, perhaps rocks seem less obvious candidates for sympathy than trees, and the frequent connection in the *Aeneid* between rocks, mountains and the monstrous may add to this sense (cf. Hardie [n. 7], 100–3, 264–5). Nevertheless, one might find at least some pathos in moments of lapidary anthropomorphism, as when the anxious Latinus is like a wave-battered rock (*Aen.* 7.586–90, parallel to the Aeneas-as-storm-battered-tree simile of *Aen.* 4.441–6), or the man-mountain Atlas at *Aen*. 4.246–51, as well as the fall of Bitias (see n. 7).

[19] Contrast, notoriously, Aeneas' removal of Faunus' sacred oleaster at *Aen*. 12.766–73: see R.F. Thomas, 'Tree violation and ambivalence in Vergil', *TAPhA* 118 (1988), 261–73.

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