

Wake, Siren: Ovid Resung

Maclaughlin (N.) Pp 354, London: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019. Paper, £10.99. ISBN: 978-0374538583.

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It is not a small task to take on the stories of Ovid, that have been resung in a multitude of different ways throughout the ages. However, it is one that Maclaughlin takes on with a clear and forceful vision. The volume takes us through a plethora of different stories, not a single one without emotional charge and an acutely stylised attention to form. In keeping with her retelling of 'Ivory Girl' – the story of Pygmalion – Maclaughlin takes the characters that mythology formed and gives them flesh and blood through her storytelling.

As is to be expected with any tale about a woman in the ancient world, a content warning should be woven into the spine of this volume. The feminist lens through which Maclaughlin presents these stories can often evoke visceral, gut-wrenching feelings of disappointment in how little we have progressed as a society in the 2,000 years since these tales were once told, summarised aptly in the story of Caenis in which she wishes to be turned into a man because she 'never want [s] to suffer like that again'. Maclaughlin's retelling explores how those in power make their moral judgements hinged upon their own agenda and ideals; on the rare occasions where the gods aren't the ones causing harm and destruction, they often sit and watch whilst others suffer. Particularly affronting is her depiction of Procne and Philomela: although the devastating nature of the tale in itself is enough for most other authors, the gentle way through which Maclaughlin oxymoronically frames the narrative whilst swooping as a bird through the sky is simultaneously harrowing and beautiful.

However, in between the affronting honesty of her storytelling, cracks of hope shine through Maclaughlin's writing through her depiction of female friendship and unconditional love. Her story of Scylla – which focuses in equal parts on the story of Galatea – demonstrates the strength of female allyship. She makes the tale relatable through framing it in memories of teenage sleepovers and secret sharing, creating a vehicle through which to highlight the frighteningly everyday manner through which women have to deal with unwanted attention. Similarly, the story of Baucis (which, I will admit, made me shed a tear on the DLR) shows the simple goodness of some people and a metamorphosis which is, for once, not prompted by pain to escape the world, but by a desire to stay entangled with someone as long as possible.

Maclaughlin should be applauded for her use of form throughout this piece which is a pleasure and a highlight. Her

combinations of poetry and prose allow the reader to understand the pain and confusion of the characters contemporaneously to their own understanding, allowing you to immerse yourself in their world. Particular highlights were the use of the therapeutic conversation in Myrrha, the visually and semantically beautiful depiction of Semele and the apt singing of Canens.

Although I enjoyed the stark contrast between the portrayals of the characters, her varied use of language and tone may be divisive: summed up by the 'anyway, this is Karen' tone of the story of Agave, although there are clear artistic choices made with the depictions of characters, the almost 'TikTok' Ovid that we see would be an excellent teaching resource for older classes to analyse characterisation and modern reception of these tales. Similarly, Alcmena's paragraph-less stream of consciousness felt as if it had been directly lifted from a VT monologue. However, from a purely literary standpoint, Maclaughlin's use of language is so beautiful, I did find myself trying to race through some of the very modern interpretations to get back looking to the Ali Smith-esque lyricism of tales like Tiresias.

From a teaching perspective, this book would be a masterclass in how Ovid uses form in the *Metamorphoses*. Maclaughlin makes this transition palatable whilst still giving the due care and attention to the nuanced meter and style of the original. Although tales would need to be carefully selected depending on the age group, this book would certainly suit a sixth form audience and act as a brilliant gateway into wider reading. Outside of Classics, this would also make an interested read for any English literature students analysing the use of form or any students looking to study sociology and gender studies at a higher level.

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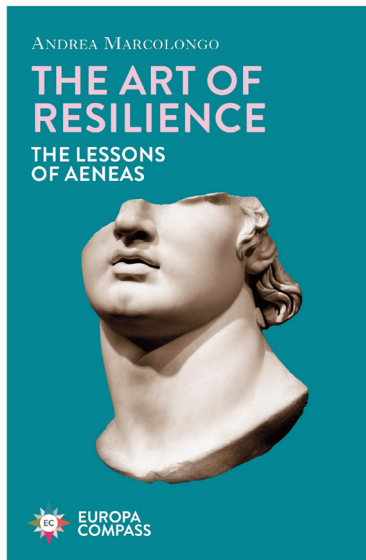
The Art of Resilience: The Lessons of Aeneas

Marcolongo (A.) (translated from the Italian by Will Schutt) Pp. 243, map. London: Europa Editions, 2022 (first published 2020 by Gius. Laterza & Figli). Paper, £10.99. ISBN: 978-1-78770-387-2.

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This recent translation, from the original Italian, by Will Schutt of Andrea Marcolongo's *La Lezione di Enea* is an enjoyable work in which the reader is invited to accompany Marcolongo on her reflections of the relevancy of Virgil's magnum opus. Marcolongo reflects on her own experience as a secondary school student reading the *Aeneid* for the first time and grappling with an epic hero whose claim to fame was his commitment to duty or *pietas*. Any student would seemingly rather prefer a more glamorous heroic character, such as those of Homer's great epics. During the struggles and loneliness of the COVID-19 lockdowns, Marcolongo finds herself reflecting on the appeal of the *Aeneid* and re-evaluating her original struggles with Aeneas as an epic hero. During the tumult and uncertainty of a global pandemic, the character of Aeneas presents himself in this new context as the hero for our times. In her



reflections, Marcolongo discovers an epic hero perfect for our own times – an epic hero who is deeply human in his empathy, in his emotions, and in his tenacity in the face of adversity.

The work is composed of nine chapters, which range in focus from Aeneas as the unlikely hero to the artistry of the *Aeneid* as a literary work to the historical reception of the *Aeneid* as a monumental text of the literary canon. At times, the work can seem a bit meandering, which can make it enjoyable for the reader who is familiar with

the *Aeneid* and who likely shares the experience of being frustrated at times with Aeneas as an epic hero. Marcolongo concludes her reflections on Aeneas with an excerpt from Giorgio Caproni's poem about the relevance of the *Aeneid*. Through this poem, she highlights two essential characteristics of Aeneas – two characteristics which she seems to propose as an essential hermeneutic key for truly appreciating Aeneas as an authentic and truly human epic hero – determination and uncertainty.

Excerpts from this work could certainly be used to inspire classroom discussions about the complexity of Aeneas as an epic hero or when one's students are inevitably perplexed by the epic hero who seems all too human and all too real at times. Individual chapters could easily be separated out from this work to be used in the classroom. The author's writing style allows the work to be easily accessible to the secondary school student and the reflections back on her own study of the *Aeneid* as a secondary school student allows the work to be easily relatable to current students. There are definitely moments reading the *Aeneid* when the reader naturally gets frustrated with Aeneas and in those moments, Marcolongo's reflections might help to inform or at least provide a framework for our struggles with this man who did not seek glory in far-off wars, but who rather sought a place of refuge on distant shores for the remnant of his defeated people.

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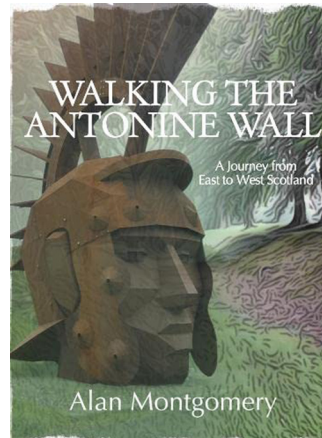
Walking the Antonine Wall: A Journey from East to West Scotland

Montgomery (A.) Pp. 254, Perth: Tippermuir Books, 2022. Paper £11.99. ISBN: 978-1913836122.

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The Antonine Wall has always been, in the words of Alan Montgomery, an 'overlooked and underappreciated' monument,



long overshadowed by the more substantial wall erected by Hadrian 100 miles to the south. The only ancient written account of the construction of the Antonine Wall is a blurb in the *Historia Augusta*, and the earthwork composition of the wall, which was subsequently abandoned by the Roman military not long after it was built, has resulted in a dearth of archeological evidence. As a taxi driver, dropping Montgomery off in a remote location near the eastern edge of the wall

remarked, 'The thing is, it's really just a ditch.'

In *Walking the Antonine Wall*, Montgomery endeavours to challenge these sorts of dismissive attitudes about this ancient structure by recounting his adventure of retracing the path of the Antonine Wall on foot, a journey of 38 miles through archeological sites, agricultural fields, woodlands, golf courses, hilltops, and bustling modern-day towns between Edinburgh and Glasgow. Part travel memoir, part guidebook, part scholarly monograph, and part encomium for the nation of Scotland, *Walking the Antonine Wall* offers the reader 'not only a thick slice of Scottish history, but also a snapshot of modern Scotland'.

Montgomery describes a variety of interesting sites along the path: Watling Lodge, the best-preserved section of the original Roman ditch that was built to fortify the wall; Tappoch Broch, a relatively well-preserved Iron Age fortress; Seabegs Wood, which offers evidence of the Military Way, the Roman road that ran parallel to the Antonine Wall on the south side of the rampart; and Croy Hill, where a giant steel sculpture of the head of a Roman centurion has recently been installed.

Two of the highlights of the book – and of Montgomery's journey itself – are the visits to the Rough Castle Roman camp and Bar Hill fort. At Rough Castle, the author notes a humorous Latin sign for modern-day dog walkers in the park (*Cura ut canis excrementum in receptacula in area vehiculorum posita deponas*), and he then describes, on a much more sombre note, the evidence of pits which would have contained concealed sharpened stakes, built north of the wall as defensive traps for invaders and once gruesomely nicknamed *lilia* ('lilies') by the men of Julius Caesar, who employed these tactics during the siege of Alesia in Gaul. As for Bar Hill, the dramatic vistas provided by the high elevation of the site make it Montgomery's favorite spot along the entire Antonine Wall path: 'It may not have the best-preserved Roman buildings ... but as a whole, Bar Hill has something special about it. If you can only visit one site on the Antonine Wall, this is undoubtedly the one that I would recommend.'

In respect to the visual aids included in *Walking the Antonine Wall*, the maps are small and somewhat difficult to read, and although the illustrations (created by Rob Hands) are attractive and contribute a certain timeless quality to the book, actual photographs of some of the locations visited by the author would have offered more clarity. I was also disappointed in the lack of practical information – Rick Steves-style recommendations for hotels, restaurants, restroom facilities, etc. – in the text. As Montgomery explains, he had originally intended to complete his walk in three and a half days, but inclement weather conditions and significant Covid disruptions resulted in a piecemeal journey completed over