

*Honor culture, praise, and Servius' Aeneid**Robert A. Kaster*

One night in the early 1920s a musician in Paris was startled awake by the sound of pounding at his hotel room door. Going to open it, he found a heavily built man holding a smallish dog. The man was the musician Sidney Bechet, who had heard that the room's occupant was bragging around town that his dog was the "most dog" – that is, the meanest dog there was. Since Bechet believed *his* dog to be the most dog, he took the other man's boast to be a slur upon his animal and so, by an obvious extension, a slur upon himself. He intended to settle the matter there and then.

Bechet is remembered today as a genius of the soprano saxophone. A slightly older contemporary of Louis Armstrong, born and raised in the Creole culture of New Orleans, he is just about the only jazz musician of the period who is generally held to have been Armstrong's peer in the richness of his tone and the brilliance of his improvisations. He is also remembered for being a person as difficult as his recalcitrant instrument. This reputation was earned in a series of incidents like the Parisian dog affair that caused him to be jailed or deported repeatedly in his mostly expatriate career: the series reached a climax of sorts in 1929 when he was jailed in Paris for 15 months, and then deported, for wounding three people in a duel he fought with a banjo-player after they disagreed over a song's harmonic structure.<sup>1</sup>

Sidney Bechet came to mind willy-nilly as I was thinking about the subject of this essay. Biographical sketches of him usually take the line that he had a "fiery temper," that he was "undisciplined" or "unfortunately belligerent," and I suppose by contemporary (North-American, middle-class) standards all that is true. But I came to think about Bechet because I suspect that his behavior was not just a quirk of personal temperament.

<sup>1</sup> For Bechet's own side of the contretemps with the banjo-player, Mike McKendrick, see his engaging oral autobiography, *Treat it Gentle*, pp. 150–2.

I suspect, in fact, that he was a man who found himself in the wrong time and the wrong culture. A man truly at home in an honor culture, Bechet had the misfortune to live in a world where the concept of honor had been radically thinned by the transient relationships, impersonal exchanges, and rationalized routines of modernity – the same routines and exchanges that help us indulge the luxury of a private self and insulate that self from the knocks and jars of everyday transactions.

If I go to buy an automobile, I do not expect the exchange to turn on considerations of honor: that is, the kind and quality of the car I drive away does not depend on the value the dealer places on me as a person, and the exchange is not made in consideration of some obligation to the dealer I now feel bound to discharge, in a way that will in turn depend on how I value the dealer and my relationship with him. It's the worth of the car that's at stake in the transaction, not my worth or the dealer's, and that worth is determined in some rationalized, quantifiable way, expressed in the impersonal metric of dollars. By the same token, if I happen to disagree with you about a song's harmonic structure, I assume that we will resolve the disagreement by the objectively task-specific process of consulting the sheet music, not by fighting a duel. Sidney Bechet fought a duel, not just because looking at the sheet music was not an option (he could not read music), but most of all because the harmonic structure was not, at base, the matter at issue. The issue was his word and his honor. That honor radiated out like so many nerve endings from every detail of his being, projecting his ego into the world for others to judge and admire, and at the same time leaving it exposed, in countless ways, to caressing and to bruising alike. It is not for nothing that more duels were fought in New Orleans than in any other American city.

The very touchy honor of Sidney Bechet and the reception of classical texts join up, in my mind, in the perhaps unlikely person of the grammarian Servius, as he is represented by his commentary on the *Aeneid*. Produced in the early fifth century, the commentary gives us the only full pre-Christian reading of the poem that also draws extensively on the preceding four centuries of Vergilian exegesis. (I should note, parenthetically, that I will be concerned only with the so-called vulgate Servius<sup>2</sup> and will leave out of account the supplementary notes found in the interpolated commentary known as the Servius Auctus or Servius Danielis. Doing so will allow us to concentrate on a text that is fairly straightforwardly the product of a single man working at a roughly determinate point in time.)

<sup>2</sup> Thilo and Hagen (eds.), *Servii Grammatici*.

Servius' reading of the poem starts from a famous – or notorious – statement about the poet's "intention" (*Aen.* 1 praef.):

*intentio Vergilii haec est, Homerum imitari et Augustum laudare a parentibus. namque est filius Atiae, quae nata est de Iulia, sorore Caesaris, Iulius autem Caesar ab Iulo Aeneae originem ducit, ut confirmat ipse Vergilius [1.288] "a magno demissum nomen Iulo."*

Vergil's intention is this: to imitate Homer and to praise Augustus by reference to his ancestors. For [Augustus] is the son of Atia, Julius Caesar's niece, while Caesar descends from Aeneas' son, Iulus, as Vergil himself confirms by referring to "the name derived from great Iulus."

Now, whatever your view of Vergil's stance vis-à-vis Augustus, you are bound to think that that is a rather reductive view of the poet's "intention." But having started from that premise, Servius as reader returns to it again and again, from one end of the poem to the other. For example:

*Aen.* 1.286, in the prophecy of Jupiter:

*NASCETVR ad illud respondet "certe hinc Romanos olim" et omnis poetae intentio, ut in qualitate carminis diximus, ad laudem tendit Augusti, sicut et in sexti catalogo et in clipei descriptione.*

WILL BE BORN [the verb] looks back to that [phrase used by Venus: 1.234] "surely hence one day Romans," and as I said in my remarks on the poem's character, the poet is entirely intent on praising Augustus, as in the sixth book's catalogue [*sc.* of heroes] and in the description of the shield.

*Aen.* 4.234, in Jupiter's message to Aeneas at Carthage, conveyed by Mercury:

*ASCANIONE propter illud quod frequenter diximus, ipsi imperium deberi. ideo autem hoc asserit poeta, ut laudando Iulum Caesarem laudet, quia ab eo originem ducit, ut [1.288] "Iulius a magno demissum nomen Iulo."*

[Mentioned here] because supreme rule is his due, as I have said a number of times. Moreover, the poet makes this claim so that by praising Iulus he might praise Caesar, the latter being descended from the former, thus "the name derived from great Iulus."

*Aen.* 7.170, in the description of Latinus' palace at Laurentum:

*TECTVM AVGVSTVM INGENS domum, quam in Palatio diximus ab Augusto factam, per transitum laudat.*

VAST, INSPIRING DWELLING He praises in passing the house that Augustus built on the Palatine.

*Aen.* 12.166, with reference to Aeneas:

ROMANAE STIRPIS ORIGO *hoc ad laudem Augusti respicit.*

SOURCE OF THE ROMAN STOCK This is said with respect to the praise of Augustus.

With that premise securely in place, too, Servius regularly finds exquisite – or if you prefer, far-fetched – touches that Vergil supposedly incorporated to bring honor to Augustus. For example, in the catalogue of Italian warriors at the end of Book 7, when the narrator refers to Aricia, the nymph-mother of the mysterious figure Virbius, Servius offers (*Aen.* 7.761–2):

QVEM MATER ARICIA MISIT *civitas iuxta Alba. “mater” autem propter Augustum dicit, qui fuerat ex Aricina matre progenitus: ac si diceret, quae tanti auctor est generis.*

WHOM MOTHER ARICIA SENT However, he uses the word “mother” because of Augustus, whose mother was from Aricia, as if to say “[Aricia], from which so great a lineage issued.”

And when – during Aeneas’ tour of the future site of Rome – the narrator winks at the reader by pointing out the cows “lowing in the fashionable Carinae” northeast of the forum, Servius finds Augustus lurking (*Aen.* 8.360–1):

LAVTIS MVGIRE CARINIS . . . *“lautas” . . . dixit aut propter elegantiam aedificiorum, aut propter Augustum, qui natus est in †curiis† veteribus et nutritus in [lautis] Carinis.*

He used the epithet “*lautas*” either because of the smartness of the buildings [in the quarter] or because of Augustus, who was born in †*curiis*† and raised in the Carinae.<sup>3</sup>

On the strength of Vergil’s “intention” Servius also regularly interprets historical references so as to assure us that they could not have been offensive to Augustus; alternatively, he finds an Augustan allusion where it is at least unclear that any was intended, and then exerts himself to make the allusion anodyne. We can consider just two examples from Book 6.

When near the end of the so-called Catalogue of Heroes Anchises addresses “great Cato,” we can be sure that Cato the Elder is meant because of the mainly middle-republican focus of this segment and Cato’s

<sup>3</sup> Thilo and Hagen (eds.), *Servii Grammatici*, vol. II, p. 253, printed in *curiis veteribus et nutritus in lautis carinis* but expressed in the apparatus a preference, I think correct, for bracketing *lautis* (i.e., as an interpolation that crept in from the lemma). I do not know, however, what sense Thilo attributed to *curiis* (or *Curiis*), while the reading *cunis* found in some MSS seems scarcely more plausible (one could suppose that Servius wrote “*natus est Curibus veteribus*,” but the historical error is too gross). The textual question is irrelevant to the more general point concerning Servius’ readiness to find unexpected “honorific” notices of Augustus.

hostility to Carthage, which looms large among the figures about to be mentioned; but those are not considerations that engage Servius' attention (*Aen.* 6.841–3):

*quis te, magne Cato, tacitum aut te, Cosse, relinquat?  
quis Gracchi genus aut geminos, duo fulmina belli,  
Scipiadas . . .*

Who would leave you unsung, great Cato, or you, Cossus,  
Who the line of Gracchus or the paired descendants of Scipio,  
Two thunderbolts of war . . . ?

*MAGNE CATO* *Censorium dicit, qui scripsit historias, multa etiam bella confecit: nam Uticensem praesente Augusto, contra quem pater eius Caesar et dimicavit et Anticatores scripsit, laudare non poterat.*

*GREAT CATO* He means the Censor, who wrote histories and concluded many wars: for in Augustus' presence he could not praise Cato of Utica, against whom his father, Caesar, both fought and wrote the *Attacks on Cato*.

Or take the moment, earlier in his time in the underworld, when Aeneas learns of the punishments the wicked suffer in Tartarus. After a number of examples drawn from myth, the list concludes with a catalogue of generic offenders against proper human relations in civil society. Meeting the last category – “those who pursued impious arms and did not scruple to deceive their masters' right hands [i.e., their loyalty]” – one might think that if any specific historical events are meant, they are the several slave rebellions that terrified generations of Romans from the second century BCE on down to the last and greatest, the revolt of Spartacus, finally put down the year before Vergil was born. But with Augustus never far from his mind Servius sees things differently (*Aen.* 6.608–14):

*hic, quibus invisi fratres, dum vita manebat,  
pulsatusve parens et fraus innexa clienti,  
aut qui divitiis soli incubuere repertis  
nec partem posuere suis (quae maxima turba est),  
quique ob adulterium caesi, quique arma secuti  
impia nec veriti dominorum fallere dextras,  
inclusi poenam exspectant.*

Here were those who hated their brothers, while life remained,  
Or struck a parent and wove a deceitful snare for a client,  
Or engrossed all for themselves the wealth they'd found  
And set aside no portion for their kin (a very great throng),  
Those, too, cut down as adulterers and those who followed impious  
Arms and did not scruple to deceive their masters' right hands:  
Here imprisoned, they await their punishment.

QVIQVE ARMA SECVTI IMPIA NEC VERITI DOMINORVM FALLERE DEXTRAS hoc loco videtur blandiri Augusto, quia contra Caesarem, patrem eius, multi quibus ignovit, arma susceperant; . . . ut “arma impia” civilia dixerit bella, quae moverunt Pompeiani contra acceptae veniae fidem. sed non procedit. nam si “arma impia” dixit bellum civile, tangit et Augustum et Caesarem, qui et ipsi civilia bella tractarunt. item si culpatur eos qui contra fidem datae veniae dimicaverunt, tangit Augustum: nam transierunt ad eum ab Antonio duo milia equitum, per quos est victoriam consecutus. . . . fecit praeterea iniuriam Augusto vel Caesari si eos “dominos” dixit, quod apud maiores invidiosum fuit. . . . melius ergo est ut bellum a Sexto Pompeio. . . . in Siculo freto gestum accipiamus. nam occiso patre Siciliam tenuit et collectis inde servitiis vastavit sex annis ultro citroque Siciliam, postea victus est ab Augusto et Agrippa. . . . et hoc sensu tam “arma impia,” quam “dominorum” congruit commemoratio. (emphasis added)

Here he seems to ingratiate himself with Augustus, since many of those his father, Caesar, had pardoned took up arms against him; . . . so that by “arma impia” he meant the civil wars that the Pompeians stirred up, contrary to the promises made when they accepted pardon. But that doesn’t work. For if by “arma impia” he meant civil war, he touches upon both Augustus and Caesar, who also had a hand in civil wars themselves. Likewise if he faults those who went to war contrary to the promises made when they accepted pardon, he touches upon Augustus: for two thousand knights went over to him from Antony, and they were instrumental in his victory. . . . Furthermore, he insulted Augustus or Caesar if he called them “masters,” which was an invidious term among our ancestors. . . . It’s better, then, to take him to mean the war waged by Sextus Pompey. . . . in the Straits of Messina. For after his father was killed, Sextus occupied Sicily, gathered slaves from there, and laid waste. . . . to Sicily for six years, though he was later defeated by Augustus and Agrippa. . . . And this interpretation squares as much with the phrase “treacherous arms” as with mention of “masters.” (emphasis added)

Let’s set aside the fact that alluding to Sextus Pompey’s use of slaves is a move Vergil is unlikely to have made – unless we assume he also wanted to remind his audience that Augustus himself had used 20,000 slaves to man his own fleet in the same war (Suet. *Aug.* 16.1). No, the real point of interest here is the behavior of Servius, who starts from an unwarranted premise – that the lines *must* be about Augustus – which he then extends by assuming that they *must* be favorable to him. The resulting hermeneutic gymnastics seem to me remarkable, though perhaps not as remarkable as the fact that several of Vergil’s most distinguished modern commentators have followed him.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See Norden (ed.), *Aeneis, Buch VI*, p. 289 (“Hierzu bringt Servius eine jedenfalls aus guter Zeit stammende Bemerkung. . . .”), Williams, *The Aeneid of Virgil*, vol. 1, p. 497, Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos, liber sextus*, p. 195; cf. also, e.g., Berry, “The criminals in Virgil’s Tartarus,” p. 416.

Now, when we see Servius' initial formulation of Vergil's "intention" and then trace the sorts of analysis that it seems to prompt, we might well think that, as one of our scholarly forebears, he's pretty much doing one of the things we do in reading the poem; he's just not doing it very well. That is, given the obvious fact that Vergil expressly incorporates Augustus in his poem at several points, we make it our premise that he must have had a particular view of the *princeps*: we wonder what that view was, and we try to define it. The difference is that Servius seems to have made the freshman mistake of assuming what it was properly his burden to prove, taking the view as given and spinning out his analyses from there. We perhaps shake our heads and make clucking sounds: ah, poor Servius.

If that is our impulse, however, I suggest that we restrain ourselves: not because Servius gets it right, exactly, but because our starting points and aims and Servius' starting points and aims are perhaps not at all as congruent as they seem. Let us suppose instead that Servius imagined Augustus to be like the grandees of his own day – his students' fathers – only more so; and let us suppose that those grandees were, in matters of honor, much closer to Sidney Bechet than to any reader of this essay (or its author) – that in matters of honor, in fact, they made even [insert preferred name here], that most thin-skinned of modern academics, look like a whacking great rhinoceros. Those two very reasonable suppositions, as I think they are, put us in a world where the scope for merely neutral comment or observation is radically reduced; where just about everything can be seen to be drenched in value; and where anything that has value attached to it potentially reflects on one's own value, expressed in the medium of praise and blame. It is a world where my saying to you "nice tie" or "good dog" does not simply rank the tie or dog in question relative to other ties or dogs but is understood to be intended to rank *you*, of whom the tie or dog are merely extensions. It is a world, in fact, where even if I do not compliment your tie or dog in so many words, I can be assumed to be thinking about them – just because they are yours, and therefore supremely important – and I therefore can be taken to allude to them even if I do not speak of them expressly. In such a world, the very obvious fact that Vergil mentions Augustus *must* mean that he intends either to praise or to blame him; and the equally obvious fact that he does not blame him must mean that he intends to praise him. QED.

Servius of course does not speak explicitly in such terms, nor should we expect him to. There are, however, two absolutely pervasive elements of his commentary that tend strongly to corroborate the suggestion that I have just made about his cultural presuppositions, and by extension those of the

tradition to which he was heir. First, there is the fact that the poem, seen through Servius' eyes, is indeed drenched in value and value judgments, so that Servius sees praise where we – or certainly, I – see merely a simple description or a statement of fact. Second, there is Servius' extraordinary sensitivity to the tactical uses of praise. Let me use the rest of my space to give just a few examples of these two salient features.

For the perception that praise is everywhere, waiting to be found even in language that seems merely descriptive, consider the following examples.

In Book 4, the narrator says of the personified Fama that (*Aen.* 4.174–5):

*Fama, malum qua non aliud velocius ullum:  
mobilitate viget virisque adquirit eundo.*

Gossip, swifter than any evil: it quickens with movement  
And gains strength in its travels.

Servius somewhat unexpectedly finds this to be an instance of praise *a contrario*:

MOBILITATE VIGET . . . *laudat a contrario: cum enim omnia labore minuuntur,  
haec crescit.*

GAINS STRENGTH IN ITS TRAVELS . . . for though toil makes all things less,  
[*Fama*] grows.

In Book 5, describing the huge corselet that Aeneas awards as one of the prizes in the boat race, the narrator says:

*vix illam famuli Phegeus Sagarisque ferebant  
multiplicem conixi umeris; indutus at olim  
Demoleos cursu palantis Troas agebat.*

The servants Phegeus and Sagaris scarce carried it,  
Many-layered, as their shoulders strained  
Under the load; but Demoleos once wore it  
As he drove the scattering Trojans at a run.

to which Servius responds first by noting,

*PHEGEVS SAGARISQVE nominatim dicendo addidit laudem,*

*PHEGEVS SAGARISQVE* By mentioning them by name he added praise,  
and then by remarking

*CVRSV PALANTES TROAS AGEBAT ad Aeneae qui eum [sc. Demoleos, cf.  
260–62] vicit pertinet laudem.*

DROVE THE SCATTERING TROJANS AT A RUN This looks to the praise of  
Aeneas, who defeated him.



In Book 8, as Aeneas reaches the site of Rome, he finds gathered Evander and (*Aen.* 8.104–6),

*Pallas huic filius una,  
una omnes iuvenum primi pauperque senatus  
tura dabant, tepidusque cruor fumabat ad aras.*

Together with him his son, Pallas,  
Together all the foremost youth and the poor senate  
Offered incense; the warm gore steamed at the altars.

Servius offers alternative explanations of the epithet *pauper*:

*IVVENVM PRIMI PAVPERQVE SENATVS... "pauper"... aut ad numerum retulit, centum enim sub Romulo fuerunt: aut re vera "pauper," per quod Romani imperii ostenditur parsimonia, pro laude tunc habita*

THE FOREMOST YOUTH AND THE POOR SENATE Either he applied the epithet "pauper" to the number – for there were one hundred [senators] under Romulus – or "pauper" is to be taken literally, to make plain the austerity of Roman might, which was then regarded as praiseworthy,

where the discovery of praise is joined with a nice historicizing touch, implying the distance between Vergil's day and Servius' own. And when soon thereafter, in his first address to Evander, Aeneas assures him (*Aen.* 8.129–30),

*non equidem extimui Danaum quod ductor et Arcas  
quodque a stirpe fores geminis coniunctus Atridi.*

For my part I felt no fear because you were a leader of Greeks  
And an Arcadian, joined in your lineage to the twin sons of Atreus.

Servius finds another unexpected occasion of praise that seems to have little or nothing to do with the context:

*DANAVM QVOD DVCTOR ET ARCAS nec quod multitudinem haberes extimui,  
nec quod esses Arcas... et hoc ad laudem Euandri pertinet, qui qualitate morum meruit non timeri.*

LEADER OF GREEKS AND AN ARCADIAN I felt fear neither because you have many men nor because you are an Arcadian... And this looks to the praise of Evander, who deservedly was not feared because of the nature of his character.

For examples of Servius' readiness to find tactical uses of praise consider what follows. The first line of approach is familiar from any instance of ancient panegyric: what can be called normative praise, or praising a given quality with the aim of urging the person praised to display it. In Book 11,

for example, the reply of Diomedes to the Latin embassy is reported to have begun with these words (*Aen.* II.252):

*O fortunatae gentes, Saturnia regna . . .*  
O happy nations, realms of Saturn . . .

Servius understands Diomedes' oblique approach:

*O FORTVNATAE GENTES . . . id est "o viri semper pace gaudentes!" nam legimus [8.324–5] "aurea quae perhibent, illo sub rege fuere saecula, sic placida populos in pace regebat." et bene hoc laudat, quod eis persuadere desiderat.*

O HAPPY NATIONS . . . That is, "O men ever rejoicing in peace!" For we read, "Under that king were the ages men call 'golden,' thus he ruled the peoples in placid peace." And [Diomedes] does well to praise that which he wants to commend to [his listeners].

But the uses of praise that Servius brings to the reader's attention are much more varied, and include the following:

### **Praising person X to make a point about person Y**

At the end of Book 10, when the dying Mezentius bids a tearful farewell to his horse, he imagines the animal sharing his fate (*Aen.* 10.865–6):

*neque enim, fortissime, credo,  
iussa aliena pati et dominos dignabere Teucros.*

Nor indeed, my bravest, you will deign,  
I'm sure, to bear another's orders and Trojans as masters,

Servius makes the tactical point explicit:

*NEQVE ENIM FORTISSIME CREDO quod dignaberis habere dominos Teucros, scilicet ignavos: nam hoc intellegimus ex eo quod dixit equo "fortissime." plerumque enim ex alterius personae vituperatione vel laude, quid de alia dicatur, agnoscimus, ut hoc loco Troianos vituperatos ex equi laude cognoscimus.*

NOR INDEED, MY BRAVEST, I'M SURE That you will deign to have Trojans as master, that is to say, cowards: for this is what we infer from his addressing the horse as "bravest." For often from the blame or praise of one character we recognize what is being said about another, as in this case we recognize from the praise of the horse that the Trojans have been blamed.

### **Praising person X for quality A to excuse mention of quality B**

At the start of Book 4, the love-struck Dido exclaims at the physical impression that the hero makes (*Aen.* 4.11),

*quem sese ore ferens, quam forti pectore et armis!*

What fine looks and bearing, what gallant chest and shoulders!

*FORTI PECTORE ET ARMIS . . . bene virtutis commemoratione excusat supra dictam pulchritudinis laudem.*

GALLANT CHEST AND ARMS . . . She does well to excuse the preceding praise of his beauty by mentioning his martial courage.

Servius obviously reads *forti pectore* metonymically, and takes *armis* to be a form of *arma*, not *armus*, for he explains that the mention of Aeneas' martial prowess excuses the less creditable praise of his beauty just preceding.

### **Praising person X for A while implicitly blaming him for B**

In Book 6, Lucius Junius Brutus is described as (*Aen.* 6.820–1):

*. . . natosque pater noua bella mouentis  
ad poenam pulchra pro libertate uocabit.*

. . . the father [who] will, for fair liberty's sake, summon  
His sons to punishment when they stir up warfare anew.

According to Servius:

*PVLCHRA PRO LIBERTATE ingenti arte loquitur consideratione personarum: factum enim laudat dicens "pulchra pro libertate," personam vituperat.*

FOR FAIR LIBERTY'S SAKE He speaks with enormous skill, from contemplation of the characters involved: for in saying "for fair liberty's sake," he praises the deed but blames the character.

### **Praising person X for A to imply that he lacks B**

Finally, in the prelude to the duel at the start of Book 12, Servius finds a fair amount of craftiness in the opening Latinus chooses when he addresses Turnus as a "young man of extraordinary spirit" (*Aen.* 12.19–21):

*o praestans animi iuuenis, quantum ipse feroci  
uirtute exsuperas, tanto me impensius aequum est  
consulere atque omnis metuentem expendere casus.*

O young man of extraordinary spirit, the more you  
Yourself excel in fierce *virtus*, the more unstintingly  
Do I ponder, rightly, and fearfully weigh all outcomes.

O PRAESTANS ANIMI . . . *sane magnae moderationis est haec oratio: nam et laudat Turnum quasi virum fortem, et tamen eum a singulari certamine dehortatur: dicens enim "praestans animi" latenter ostendit eum inferiorem esse virtute.*

O . . . OF EXTRAORDINARY SPIRIT . . . This is, of course, a superbly balanced speech, for he both praises Turnus as a hero and yet seeks to dissuade him from the duel: in using the phrase "extraordinary spirit" he implicitly shows that he's inferior in *virtus*.

– despite the fact that the very next words out of Latinus' mouth stress Turnus' surpassing *virtus*, while he at no point in his speech suggests that Turnus is the lesser warrior.

A certain amount of this, of course, will be unsurprising to anyone who has read the ancient rhetoricians on praise and blame. But that does not mean that this is "merely" rhetorical criticism. Servius is not as sensitive as he is to praise and its uses because he knew his rhetorical theory; rather, rhetorical theory was as interested as it was in praise and blame because of the culture from which it emerged, an honor culture in which few statements about a person or his attributes were value-neutral. In that culture, speaking of a person's ancestors almost inevitably meant that one would be taken to be praising them or blaming them, and thereby praising or blaming the person himself.

It is perhaps also worth reflecting that the honor culture within which Servius read the poem was – despite all the other ways the world had changed – not very different from the honor culture within which Vergil wrote it.

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