



Review: [untitled]

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Source: *The Classical World*, Vol. 85, No. 2 (Nov. - Dec., 1991), p. 128

Published by: [Classical Association of the Atlantic States](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4351036>

Accessed: 08/01/2011 14:46

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works as vehicles for his own view of the relation of the individual to the community. That the Athenian audiences who first saw and heard these tragedies got the political messages the author thinks they may have, may well be questioned.

The book is very closely, but wordily, written and supported by long notes—virtually parts of the text—which chiefly cite points of view about the interpretation of the classical works similar to the author's. It is indeed hard to discover exactly what the author means by "the tragedy of political theory" or "the road not taken", perhaps the failure of modern political theorists to adhere more closely to the political lessons, as he reads them, of Greek tragedy, Thucydides, and Plato.

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CW 85.2 (1991)

MASON HAMMOND

James J. O'Hara. *Death and the Optimistic Prophecy in Vergil's Aeneid*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. Pp. xi, 207. \$32.50. ISBN 0-691-06815-1.

O'Hara argues "that many of the prophecies in the *Aeneid*, both the short-term prediction of events later in the poem, and the long-term predictions like Jupiter's of the future glory of the Rome of Augustus Caesar, are deceptive in a way that is central to interpretation of the poem." Readers as well as Vergil's characters "must struggle with the possibility that the surface optimism of the poem or prophecy is undercut by darker material partially suppressed."

The author succeeds admirably in (a) demonstrating the fundamental ambiguity or duplicity of many of the poem's prophecies; (b) disclosing motivations (rhetorical and other) underlying deceitful or misleading prophecies; (c) establishing that falsely optimistic prophetic utterances interact in a cumulatively effective array; and (d) proving that such ambiguity is calculatedly productive of a sense of unease in the mind of the reader. The reader must struggle "with the conflict between the poem's surface optimism and its less explicit but unmistakable anxieties and darker undertones," just as the poem's characters "must deal with prophecies brighter than the world in which they live, and that of the Romans of Vergil's day, who had lived through decades of civil strife and broken promises."

O'Hara believes that this aura of doubt and apprehension is present by design, that it is neither anachronistic nor inappropriate to find more in the *Aeneid* than an unmodulated encomium to Roman and Augustan manifest destiny.

The book is chock-full of sensible interpretations couched in a critical idiom accessible to undergraduates as well as to professional classicists. It is gratifying to see a critic drawing judiciously on current thinking in literary interpretation, in particular reader-response criticism (Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish), without obscuring his argument with ugly theoretical jargon.

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