

This short book is a study of the epic tradition of the early Roman empire and specifically of the epic poems of Ovid, Lucan, Statius, Valerius Flaccus and Silius Italicus. It explores the use they made of Virgil's Aeneid, an epic interpreted not just as a monument to the heroic construction of the principate, but also as a problematical text that challenged succeeding epic poets to a reworking of the issues that it dramatised: the possibility of establishing a lasting age of peace, the relation between power and the sacred, the difficulties of distinguishing between good and its evil parodies, anxiety about imperial and poetic succession. The author draws on modern critical and theoretical approaches to argue for the vitality and interest of works which have all too often been relegated to a second division of literary history.

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