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Gift Objects in Virgil's Aeneid

Abstract

According to the anthropology of things, gifts are special objects with their own history and memory. They are able to promote, create and maintain social ties between people because of their role of cultural and personal meaning bearers (Gregory 1982b; Kopytoff 1986; von Reden 1995: esp. 60 f.). To some extent, this was also true in ancient Rome, where gift-giving was a widespread practice of reciprocity that allowed to weave a complex net of relationships. Such complexity is reflected in the most representative poem of Roman culture: Virgil's *Aeneid*. My paper aims to investigate the representation of the gift-objects in the *Aeneid*, having regard to the narrative devices and the cultural and mythical categories involved. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to highlight the active role that gift objects play in the poem: what are their relational functions and what purpose do they serve? Do such objects show to have any sort of *agency*? Are they gendered connoted? To what extent may the identity and the intentions of the donor – or the identity and the needs of the receiver – influence their nature, outcomes, and representations? I intend to pay special attention to the relationships between hosts and guests in the epic context and to the depictions of the objects exchanged in the poem: the textile gifts (*textilibus donis*) that Andromache gives to Ascanius, a souvenir (*monumentum*) of her hands (*Aen.* 3.483-91), which Servius considers adequate to a female donor; the golden crater that Cisseus gives to Anchises (*Aen.* 5.535-38) as a reminder (*monumentum*) and a pledge of their mutual affection (*pignus amoris*); and the “family objects” that Aeneas offers to his hosts, from Dido to King Latinus, from Helenus to Evander.

Secondo l'antropologia degli oggetti, i doni sono oggetti speciali con una propria storia e memoria. Essi sono in grado di promuovere, creare e mantenere legami sociali tra le persone proprio in ragione del loro ruolo di portatori culturali e personali di significato (Gregory 1982b; Kopytoff 1986; von Reden 1995: spec. 60 s.). In qualche misura, questo è anche vero nell'antica Roma, dove quella del dono era una pratica di reciprocità diffusa, che consentiva di tessere una complessa rete di relazioni. Tale complessità si riflette nel poema più rappresentativo della cultura romana: l'*Eneide* di Virgilio. Il mio contributo mira a indagare la rappresentazione degli oggetti del dono nell'*Eneide*, con particolare riguardo agli espedienti narrativi e alle categorie culturali e mitiche coinvolte. Pertanto, l'obiettivo principale di questo studio è di evidenziare il ruolo attivo che gli oggetti del dono giocano nel poema: quali sono le loro funzioni relazionali e a quale scopo servono? Tali oggetti mostrano di avere un qualche tipo di *agency*? Hanno una connotazione di genere? In che misura l'identità e le intenzioni del donatore – o l'identità e le esigenze del destinatario – possono influenzare natura, esiti e loro rappresentazioni? Intendo prestare particolare attenzione ai rapporti tra ospiti nel contesto epico e alle rappresentazioni degli oggetti scambiati nel poema: i doni tessili (*textilibus donis*) che Andromaca offre ad Ascanio, un ricordo (*monumentum*) delle sue mani (*Aen.* 3.483-91) e che Servio considera adeguati a una donatrice; il cratere d'oro che Cisseo donò ad Anchise (*Aen.* 5.535-38) come ricordo (*monumentum*) e pegno

del reciproco affetto (*pignus amoris*); e gli “oggetti di famiglia” che Enea offre ai suoi ospiti, da Didone al re Latino, da Eleno a Evandro.

1. Introduction

That the gift is a powerful way to promote, create and maintain social ties, often asymmetric and binding, is an assumption of modern sociology and anthropology, from Malinuskj (1921, 1922) and Mauss (1923-1924) to Godbout (1992). While the latter has pointed out that gift is a «social relation»¹, Caillé went so far as to say that the gift is not only an instrument useful for establishing relationships but also the element through which individuals *create* their society.²

To some extent, this was also true in ancient Rome, where gift-giving was a widespread practice of reciprocity that allowed to weave a complex net of relationships. Such complexity is reflected in the most representative poem of Roman culture, Virgil's *Aeneid*, which offers a wide array of “gift-giving” or “exchange-episodes”.

In this paper, I aim to explore the representation of the gift-objects in Virgil's *Aeneid*, having regard to the narrative devices and the cultural and mythical categories involved. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to highlight the active role that the objects of gift play in the poem, and their narrative and poetic function. To this end, I attempt to combine the theories of the anthropology of objects and the anthropology of gift,³ in order to focus not only on the way Virgil depicted the gifts in the *Aeneid* but also on how he viewed and narrated the invisible connections that gift-objects can draw, as far as we can infer from the analysis of their literary portrayals.

In this framework, I will analyse five passages singled out on the basis of their relevance and significance, not necessarily in the narrative order followed in the poem.

I will examine each narrative episode trying to answer the following questions borrowed from the most recent theories and studies of the anthropology of objects: how many categories of gift-objects can we single out within the *Aeneid*? What are their structural, narrative and relational functions? What purpose do they serve? Do such objects show to have any sort of *agency*? Were they gendered connoted? To what extent may the identity and the intentions of the donor – or the identity and the needs of the receiver – influence

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¹ GODBOUT (1992, 14 ff.).

² CAILLÉ (1998, 51-52; 79-80).

³ Specifically, I will attempt to revise the methodological model provided by MAUSS (1950), who seems to have anticipated the contemporary theories of the object's agency formulated within the framework of the anthropology of art (see GELL 1998, esp. 13-27) and the anthropology of objects (see e.g. STOCKING 1985; KOPYTOFF 1986; DASTON 2004; SEVERI 2008; BAZIN and BENZA 1994; BAZIN 1997; BONNOT 2002; PAYEN, SCHEID-TISSINIER 2012).

their nature, outcomes, and representations? And finally what kind of relationships are they able to weave with those who give or receive them?

In particular, I intend to pay special attention to the relationships between hosts and guests in the epic context and to the depictions of the associated objects, which are susceptible of becoming expressive in the presence of humans and acquiring the capacity of acting as agents.

2. *Andromache's gifts*

In book III, the Trojans arrive at Buthrotum, in Epirus, where they discover that, after Pyrrhus' death, Helenus has become king of a Greek city and married Andromache, the widow of Hector. They also learn that the city that is now under the rule of the Trojan siblings (Helenus and Andromache) turns out to be a duplicate of Troy, a smaller copy that reproduces the bigger one (*procedo et paruum Troiam simulataque magnis / Pergama*, 3.349 f.). The Trojans stay there for a few days. Virgil places the gift-giving episode before their departure, following the epic model of the ritual farewell between guests. First, Helenus provides precious items, cauldrons, a great quantity of silver, and Neoptolemus' armour,⁴ which fill the holds of Aeneas' ships, (*Aen.* 3.464-79). Then it's Andromache's turn.

Aen. 3.482-91:

nec minus Andromache digressu maesta supremo
fert picturatas auri subtemine uestis
et Phrygiam Ascanio chlamydem (nec cedit honore)
textilibusque onerat donis, ac talia fatur:
“accipe et haec, manuum tibi quae monumenta mearum
sint, puer, et longum Andromachae testentur amorem,
coniugis Hectoreae. cape dona extrema tuorum,
mihi sola mei super Astyanactis imago.
sic oculos, sic ille manus, sic ora ferebat;
et nunc aequali tecum pubesceret aevo”.

Saddened by this last parting, Andromache too offered presents: / Garments embroidered with figures of gold threaded into the fabric, / And, for Ascanius, a Phrygian cloak (he wasn't forgotten!). / Weighing him down with her textile gifts, she spoke much as follows: / “Take these too. May my hands' work serve you as memorials, / Witnessing, dear boy, the lasting love of Andromache, Hector's / Wife. Take these. They're the final gifts that your kinsmen can give you, / You, sole image surviving to me of Astyanax, my son. / You have his eyes, hands, face, his expressions, precisely his movements. / He would be your age now: a youth on the threshold of manhood.”⁵

⁴ According to WILLIAMS (1962, *ad loc.* and v. 296), Helenus has been bequeathed the armour by Neoptolemus himself.

⁵ For the text of the *Aeneid*, I follow MYNORS (1969); for the translation of the Latin text, I follow AHL (2007), except where otherwise noted.

While Aeneas is the receiver of the gifts provided by Helenus, Ascanius is the addressee of Andromache's ones. She gives him textile gifts (*textilibus ... donis*), a souvenir (*monumentum*), that is a "work" of her hands:⁶ specifically, they are valuable objects such as a garment (*uestis*) interwoven with gold and a *Phrygia chlāmys*, a kind of broad cloak for riding, frequent in military use.⁷ This latter is a textile object that underlines the Trojan identity of the donor and the receiver, marked by the hyperbaton, which encases the name of the donee (*Phrygiam Ascanio chlamydem*). Moreover, the gift is "no less honourable" (*nec cedit honore*): such annotation allows us to argue that the gift-object should have a connection with the cultural category of *honor*, which depends not only on the value of the gift but also on its origin and suitability. In other words, the gift should be honourable both for those who give it and for those who accept it. In the wake of what Foxhall points out⁸, we can argue that the value of this type of objects (especially textile objects that are generally classified as "everyday objects"), depends on their economic and prestige worth.

Furthermore, the *chlamys* is also described as "a broad, woollen upper garment (...) sometimes purple, and inwrought with gold, worn esp. by distinguished milit. characters".⁹ Such a gift is more than appropriate to a young descendant of a notable family, and particularly suitable for the giver as well. This is at least what Servius suggests in his notation when he considers Andromache's textile gifts to be also adequate to a female giver: *TEXTILIBVS sibi congruis: quid enim magis conueniebat donare mulierem?* (Serv. ad. *Aen.* 3.485 f.). Indeed, in the ancient collective image and Roman cultural code of behavior, textile gifts are viewed as particularly appropriate to a woman who is also the giver, while metal objects, such as weapons or other kinds of items, are considered a more fitting gift for a male donor.¹⁰

The issue of the suitability of the gift is recurring in the poem and, more generally, in the ancient debate about gift-giving. After enumerating the gifts to Aeneas, which are not only appropriate but also extremely useful for the future to take on the difficult task that awaits him, Virgil defines the gifts that Helenus offers to Anchises as "proper to the father" (*sua dona parenti*, 3.469).

The seer thereby proves to be an excellent donor. During the first dialogue with Aeneas, Virgil describes him as *laetus* (3.347), an inner disposition particularly apt for an effective exchange dynamic¹¹ that widely differs from the representation of Andromache as *maesta*

⁶ For the hand as «a contact point between person and thing, a point at which the boundary becomes blurred», see CANEVARO (2018, 6 and 129 ff.), who highlights the 'ability' of textile gifts to perpetuate memory (esp. 61-62). In this regard, see also HEYWORTH and MORWOOD (2017, *ad loc.*). A comprehensive study on the category of women's dress, see LLEWELLYN-JONES (2002) and ROLLASON (2006).

⁷ OLD, *ad loc.*

⁸ See FOXHALL (2021, 87).

⁹ Lewis and Short (1975, *ad loc.*).

¹⁰ On the gender connotation of textile gifts, see LLEWELLYN-JONES (2002, 127) and ROLLASON (2016, esp. 8 ff. and 22 ff.). On the connection between women and clothes, see also WEINER (1992, 2-3).

¹¹ For the analysis of *laetitia* and *gaudium* in the gift dynamics, esp. in Seneca's *de beneficiis*, see RICOTTILLI (2011, 410). See also GOUX (1996, 116 ff.).

(3.482). As Maurizio Bettini has already stressed in a brilliant paper¹², Andromache is portrayed as a melancholic shadow turned down on her past and placed in a sort of funereal dimension. This representation is conveyed not only through the adjective *maesta*, reinforced by the hyperbaton, but also through the utterance *dona extrema*, that is how Virgil calls her gifts, which implies a special bond with estrangement, isolation, and death, stressed – again – by the hyperbaton of *sola* at 3.489.

Moreover, in the above-mentioned lines, Andromache qualifies herself as the wife of Hector (*coniunx Hectorea*) – and this confirms that she is entrapped in the past, like a shadow consumed by grief.

In this episode, Virgil emphasizes the cultural pattern of memory using its specific vocabulary, like *monimenta* (3.486), accentuated by the alliteration (*manuum tibi quae monimenta mearum*), which Servius (*ad loc.*) explains as *a mentis admonitio*.¹³ In other words, the poet rewrites the objects of the gift as witnesses of Andromache's love through their personification, as the use of *testentur* indicates (3.487). That means that the object embodies the *longus amor* of Andromache as a perfect “metonymy” of the giver, a substitute for her.

The primary function of these gifts is to “prolong” the past by preserving the relationship – even the kinship – between the donor and the other surviving Trojans, who are ready and prepared to go on, but also by safeguarding the invisible tie between the surviving mother and the deceased son. Thus, Ascanius is re-imaged as a sort of *alter ego* of Astyanax: from a rhetorical perspective, the connection between these two characters and Andromache is emphasized by the use of the *hyperbata* that embed each of the three proper nouns in the text.

Therefore, the gift-object reveals a “mnemonic agency”: the power of keeping the memory of the giver alive in the receiver's mind and life, despite his/her new “funereal” identity, and to establish a lasting connection between the donor and the donee, the past and the future, the living and the dead.

3. *Acestes, Anchises and Cisseus' Gifts*

In book V, after landing in Sicily, where the Trojan Acestes rules, Aeneas realizes that it is the first anniversary of Anchises' death. So, he proposes eight days of offerings and competitive games in honour of his father. Valuable prizes are bestowed upon the competitors and they are regarded as special gifts provided by Aeneas himself. The “idea” of gift is made emphatic by the word *munus*, which occurs several times in the book – including in this episode – suggesting an overlapping of the meaning of this term¹⁴ and

¹² BETTINI (1997, 8-33).

¹³ In order to study models and parameters of female agency, CANEVARO (2018, esp. 64-67) examines the Greek character of Andromache, underlining the motif of memorialization, in which objects operate on a continuum of memory.

¹⁴ A comprehensive study on the semantic sphere of *munus* is found in PEREIRA-MENAUT (2004). As for the *Aeneid*, see also CITRONI (1987).

of the notion it conveys, which is moreover widespread in the Roman social and cultural portrayal of exchange dynamics.

Aen. 5.530-38:

Trinacrii Teucrique uiri, nec maximus omen
 abnuit Aeneas, sed laetum amplexus Acesten
 muneribus cumulat magnis ac talia fatur:
 ‘sume, pater, nam te uoluit rex magnus Olympi
 talibus auspiciis exsortem ducere honores.
 ipsius Anchisae longaeui hoc munus habebis,
cratera impressum signis, quem Thracius olim
 Anchisae genitori in magno munere Cisseus
 ferre sui dederat monimentum et pignus amoris.’

Nor did the great Aeneas deny the omen,
 but rather, having embraced Acestes,
 he heaps him greatly with gifts and speaks thus:
 “Take them, father, for by such auspices the great king of Olympus has wished
 that you especially would receive these honors beyond your lot.
 You will have this reward that once belonged to long-lived Anchises himself,
 an embossed bowl, one that once Thracian
 Cisseus had given to father Anchises in great munificence,
 to bear as a reminder and pledge of his love.”¹⁵

The relational category of *laetitia* stressed at v. 531 is linked to the prospect of receiving big gifts (*munera ... magna*), which means precious, lavish and honourable prizes. Specifically, the prize that Aeneas assigns to Acestes is “an embossed bowl”, that is a bowl with figured reliefs (*signa*). *Signum* is an identifying mark, which implies that the object of the gift is unique, exclusive, one-of-a-kind handcrafted piece. The use of this term expresses the idea of exclusivity that characterizes not only the object but also, by the transitive property, the relationship itself. In other words, the fact that the gift-object the donor has chosen for the donee is unique indicates that their bond is exclusive too.

Moreover, this gift-object once belonged to long-lived Anchises himself: it is the same bowl that once Thracian Cisseus gave to father Anchises “to bear as a reminder” (again, *monimentum*) and “pledge of his love” (*pignus amoris*). Virgil portrays the object as a splendid donation, meant to be a reminder of Anchises, to evoke the memory not only of the donor (Aeneas), but also of the former prestigious owner. In other words, the fact that the bowl for Acestes once belonged to Anchises raises the value of the gift. The parallel created by the re-used gift cooperates to increase his prestige in the eyes of Acestes and everybody’s eyes.

In the Roman perspective, the gift-objects, especially family heirlooms, are represented as “being able” to keep track of previous owners and receivers, according to some extent

¹⁵ For the translation of book V, I follow FRATANTUONO and SMITH (2015).

to the “paradox of keeping-while-giving” formulated by Annette Weiner (1992).¹⁶ Therefore, the gift acquires the capacity of acting as a special agent able to create a link between the current owner (or the current donee) and the former ones. Once again, the gift (offered to Anchises by Cisseus) is a *monimentum*, as well as in the episode of Andromache’s gift. But here it is also described as a *pignus amoris*, a pledge of their mutual affection (*pignus amoris*).¹⁷ In the Roman culture, *pignus* is a special object, a token that acts as a guarantee of mutual loyalty, reliability, and trustworthiness: the Roman category of *fides*.¹⁸ With the term *pignus*, thereby, Virgil indicates an object meant to link people, which confirms, symbolizes, and embodies the commitment that the relationship involves.

Cisseus’ gift to Anchises can be classified as a gift of honour and also included in the narrative pattern of hospitality¹⁹. The use of this object in the mentioned passage enables Virgil to reduplicate the relationship of hospitality that the bowl symbolizes. Thus, the object plays an extra-diegetic role: it appears to be a vehicle used by the author to create a specific image and emphasize the relation between Aeneas and Acestes. The reference to the object in the passage is not redundant but works as a poetic and narrative device, aimed at outlining how the relationship between Aeneas and Acestes is configured and useful for communicating (and anticipating) a positive image of Anchises, which will return in book 6.

4. Dido’s Gifts

A better understanding of the role of objects in gift-giving episodes may be gained by analysing the gifts Aeneas offers to Dido in book I. We can include these gifts among the “family objects” that the hero exchanges with his hosts²⁰.

Aen. 1.647-55:

munera praeterea Iliacis erepta ruinis
ferre iubet, pallam signis auroque rigentem
et circumtextum croceo uelamen acantho,

¹⁶ See WEINER (1992, esp. 33): «... whereas other alienable properties are exchanged against each other, inalienable possessions are symbolic repositories of genealogies and historical events, their unique, subjective identity gives them absolute value placing them above the exchangeability of one thing for another». See also GREGORY (1982a, 43) and (1982b).

¹⁷ The parallel between this passage and the Andromache’s episode should not be overlooked: it is established by the occurrence of the word *monimentum* / *monimenta*, a very similar introductory line, and the utterance *pignus amoris* which corresponds to some extent to *longum Andromachae testentur amorem*. This correspondence shows a formulaic framework, a poetic schema in the construction of the exchange-episodes.

¹⁸ Regarding the concept of *pignus*, see MINARDI (1999, esp. 90 ff.); from a semantic perspective, cf. ERNOUT and MEILLET (1931, s.v. *pignus*, 506); WALDE-HOFMANN (1954³, II, s.v. *pignus*, 302) and SANDOZ (1986). On *fides*, cf. HEINZE (1929, 149 ff.); BOYANCÉ (1964, 419), *Id.* (1972b), and FREYBURGER (1986, esp. 37 ff. and 319 ff).

¹⁹ In this regard, see FRATANTUONO and SMITH (2015, 525) and, more generally, CIOFFI (2014).

²⁰ See also SCOLARI (2018, 204-10).

ornatus Argivae Helenae, quos illa Mycenis,
 Pergama cum peteret inconcessosque hymenaeos,
 extulerat, matris Leda mirabile donum;
 praeterea sceptrum, Ilione quod gesserat olim,
 maxima natarum Priami, colloque monile
 bacatum, et duplicem gemmis auroque coronam.

Further, he ordered that presents be brought, pieces snatched from the Trojan Ruins: a mantle stiffened with figured designs and with gold thread; Also a veil, trim borders embroidered with saffron acanthus, Finery Argive Helen had brought from Mycenae when sailing Over to Pergamum, fully intent on an unapproved wedding. Wonderful handwork it was and a present from Leda, her mother; Also a sceptre that, in past times, Ilione, the eldest Daughter of Priam, had carried, along with her pearl-studded necklace, Even her two-tiered golden crown with its setting of gemstones.

Aeneas gives to Dido a mantle and a veil (*Aen.* 1.561-722), finery once belonged to Helen, admirable present (*mirabile donum*) of her mother Leda. She brought them “when sailing over to Pergamum” as a dowry for the unlawful wedding with Paris, forbidden by fate and human laws. Then, the sceptre of Ilione, who was the oldest daughter of King Priam and Queen Hekube of Troy, a necklace and a golden crown.

The nature of these gifts is particularly relevant if we consider them in conjunction with the identity and the story of their former owners: Ilione, in this case, was married off to Polymestor, king of Thracian Chersonesus, who was supposed to be an ally of Troy. But during the Trojan War he decided to kill Polydorus, the youngest son of Priam, who was at his court. So, even though at a different level, both the myths of Helen and Ilione are tales of betrayal and fatal unions.

Servius (*ad Aen.* 1.653) labels the *munera* provided by Aeneas as suitable (*apta*) for a queen and adequate for this formal diplomatic occasion. Nevertheless, they seem to warn the queen about the possible outcome of the alliance with Aeneas and the new marriage, comparable to that experienced by Helen and Ilione. In other words, the gift-objects prefigures the “illicit wedding” of the queen with the son of Anchises and the ruin to which Dido consecrates herself and her people, like a new Helen or a new Ilione.

Servius himself highlights the *futurorum malorum omen* ‘the presage of future misfortune’ that they seem to convey, as well as the memory of the past ones.²¹

Therefore, we can argue that the previous owners leave an indelible mark on Aeneas’ *munera*, a fatal warning with which Virgil anticipates the tragedy that is about to occur.²² Hence, these lavish gifts exercise a mimetic/proleptic role in the economy of the text.

²¹ For the “ominous gifts” in the *Aeneid*, see HARRISON (2014).

²² See *Aen.* 4.261-64. On this gift-giving episode, see also AKBAR KAHN (1968, 283) and BASTO (1984, 333 ff.). CONINGTON and NETTLESHIP (1979, *ad loc.*) analyse the exchange of swords between Aeneas and Dido.

But the exchange-episode of Dido is unique in so far as the gift-objects show to have a double powerful agency on the receiver: on one hand they are meant to weave a bond between Aeneas and the Phoenician queen, on the other hand they are the instruments of Venus' intervention, who turns them into animate and active subjects able to burn Dido, to poison her heart with a fatal flame [*donisque furem / incendat reginam*, "(her intent was that Cupid) madden the queen, kindle fire with the gifts", 1.659-60].²³ The narrative function of the gifts manipulated by Venus is made explicit at 1.712-14:

praecipue infelix, pesti deuota futurae,
expleri mentem nequit ardescitque tuendo
Phoenissa, et pariter puero donisque mouetur.

She above all, the descendant of Phoenix, cannot sate her senses,
Unfulfilled and vowed as an offering for future destruction,
Burns as she stares, roused equally both by the gifts and the young boy.

By the gifts – and the complicity of Cupid – Venus is capable of rousing the donee (see *donisque mouetur*), capturing her attention and influencing her choices and behaviours²⁴.

5. At the Court of Latinus

In book VII, Aeneas arrives at the promised land, *Latium*. Then, he sends a delegation of Trojans to King Latinus, in order to obtain a share of the land for the foundation of a new city. To this end, he offers gifts to the ruler in exchange for peace:

Aen. 7.152-55:
Tum satus Anchisa delectos ordine ab omni
centum oratores augusta ad moenia regis
ire iubet, ramis uelatos Palladis omnis,
donaque *ferre uiro* pacemque *exposcere* *Teucris*.

Anchises' son bids a hundred men, gifted in language,
Picked from among all ranks, now approach the august royal palace,
Each one screening his face with a branch cut from Pallas's olive.
They're to bring gifts to the ruler, to ask of him peace for the Teucrians.

As we know, gifts are to be envisioned as instruments of diplomatic persuasion. Thus, it may be argued that there is close reciprocity between *dona* and *pax*. If it's true that gifts are not only an instrument useful for establishing relations but are themselves the social

²³ For an exam of the negative reciprocity in the episode, cf. WENTZEL (2010).

²⁴ In regard to the final episode of the *Aeneid*, the killing of Turnus, OSBORNE (2021b, 4-5) underlines the role of the objects as «provocation to destructive passion» in so far as the Trojan hero's fury is brought on by the sight of a particular object, Pallas' sword belt. His definition is particularly suitable for Dido's case.

relation, as Godbout claims²⁵, then it will also be true that the gift-objects are designed to replace the required peace with which they are exchanged, to substitute it. In other words, in this passage, gifts are a “metonymy” of peace. And this receives confirmation from the perfectly symmetric construction of the verse: *dona* which corresponds with *pacem*, *ferre* to the verb *exposcere*, and the dative *uiro* (that is Latinus) with *Teucris*.

The objects offered by Aeneas are introduced by Ilioneus at the court of Latinus:

Aen. 7.243-48:

dat tibi praeterea fortunae parua prioris
munera, reliquias Troia ex ardente receptas.
hoc pater Anchises auro libabat ad aras,
hoc Priami gestamen erat cum iura uocatis
more daret populis, sceptrumque sacerque tiaras
Ilia dumque labor uestes.⁷

He, besides, offers you these small gifts from our previous fortune —
Relics salvaged from Troy as it burned. Once, with this golden vessel,
Father Anchises would pour his libations to gods at their altars.
This was regalia Priam would wear when he made his judicial
Rulings at public assemblies: his sceptre and sacred tiara,
Vestments, the handwork of women of Troy.

Not surprisingly, they are especially apt for such the purpose of asking for hospitality and alliance.²⁶ Aeneas has selected the golden cup of Anchises, the sceptre and the tiara of Priam and the clothes woven by the Trojan women (7.152-285). The Trojan provenance of these objects is strongly emphasized by the herald, who outlines the identity of the former owners, and, in doing so, enhances the value of the gifts. From a rhetoric point of view, his strategy is based on the symmetric composition of the verses, marked by the anaphora of *hoc*: *hoc pater Anchises auro libabat ad aras, / hoc Priami gestamen erat* (7.245-46). Once again the “prestige” of the objects are substantiated and fuelled by the reference to Anchises and Priam. Their royal function, authority, and reputation increase the objects’ worth, the esteem of the donor, and, as a result, Latinus’ prestige as well, who is preparing to accept them.

But, contrary to Dido’s reaction, Latinus is not persuaded by the gifts: *nec purpura regem / picta mouet nec sceptrum mouent Priameia tantum*, “Neither tapestried purple nor Priam’s / Sceptre impel the king forward [...]” (7.252-53). The king is liable to host Aeneas and his fellows because of Faunus’ prophecy concerning the wedding of Lavinia, his daughter, with a mysterious stranger. Nevertheless, the double anaphora of *nec*, along with the polyptoton of *mouet / mouent* (a verb that also occurs in Dido’s episode) may be interpreted as a device to assert that the specific function of a gift is to *mouere*, “to

²⁵ GODBOUT (1992, 14).

²⁶ See CIOFFI (2014, 624) and GIBSON (1999).

persuade”, to push someone to do something, and, from a different perspective, to have and exert agency.

6. *Evander's Gifts and the Shadow of Anchises*

The peace with the Latins was short-lived. Thus, the river god Tiberinus appears to Aeneas in a dream, and tells him to form an alliance with the Arcadian king Evander, founder of Pallantium, who is also at war with the Latins. Aeneas obeys and goes to Pallantium in person.

His visit awakens in Evander the memory of Anchises' words, voice, and face. This enables the Arcadian king to receive Aeneas as a special guest, even more, to recognize him as a fellow.²⁷

Furthermore, the alliance with Evander is ensured since the king keeps the memory of the gifts that Anchises gives him during his visit to the ancient Arcadian kingdom, when Evander was a boy (*Aen.* 8.154-74).

Aen. 8.154-59:

tum sic pauca refert: 'ut te, fortissime Teucrum,
accipio agnoscoque libens! ut uerba parentis
et uocem Anchisae magni uultumque recordor!
nam memini Hesionae uisentem regna sororis
Laomedontiaden Priamum Salamina petentem
protinus Arcadiae gelidos inuisere finis.

Briefly, he said in response: 'How happy I am to receive you,
Bravest of Teucrians. I know who you are. How well I remember
Words your great father Anchises said, and his voice, his expressions!
He, I recall, went to visit his sister Hesion's kingdom,
Salamis: Priam, I mean, Laomedon's son. On his way there he also
Visited us where we lived, in Arcadia's ice-covered regions.

The use of words covering the semantic area of 'memory' (*recordor, memini*) indicates the relevance of this category in the narrative episodes of gift-giving. It is evident that Virgil considers memory and gift-objects as closely linked. We might assume that he aims at highlighting their connection in the poem and turning them into narrative instruments provided with mnemonic agency.

Plus, Pallas, Evander's son, has inherited the objects that Anchises offered to the king.

Aen. 8.166-71:

ille mihi insignem pharetram Lyciasque sagittas
discedens chlamydemque auro dedit intertextam,
frenaque bina meus quae nunc habet aurea Pallas.
ergo et quam petitis iuncta est mihi foedere dextra,

²⁷ See FORDYCE (1977, *ad loc.*).

et lux cum primum terris se crastina reddet,
 auxilio laetos dimittam opibusque iuuabo.

He, when he left, gave me gifts: a fine quiver and Lycian arrows,
 Also a military cloak made of golden brocade and a golden
 Matched pair of bits for my horses which Pallas, my son, now possesses.
 Therefore: my right hand now joins yours in the pact you're requesting.
 And, when tomorrow's light first brings back a glow to the landscape,
 I'll send you happily off, reinforced, and I'll help with resources.

Hence, these objects can be classified not only as “gifts of hospitality”, but as “parental” or “inherited gifts” as well. This means that the memory of Anchises and the relationship the objects symbolize and even embody are destined to last through the generations, to continue with them.²⁸ As a result, we can argue that the gift-objects described in the passage are able to create a lasting, strong, indelible link between Aeneas and Evander, who have never met before, owing to the power of their mnemonic agency: “Therefore” Evander says “my right hand now joins yours in the pact you're requesting”.²⁹ And, as we already know, in the Roman culture, the right hand was considered as the hand of *fides*. Hence, Latino's answer is likely to be interpreted as follows: “you have already been granted the alliance that you are asking for”.

7. Conclusions

Exploring the representation of gift objects within the *Aeneid* allows us to gain a deeper knowledge of the narrative and cultural potential of this category of objects. As I attempt to show above, they are conceived and used in the epic context as literary devices by which the author provides keys to interpreting role, functions, and identity of the characters involved in the dynamic. In other words, they create images aimed at better defining the portraits of the characters. Therefore, to some extent, they show to have both extra-diegetic and intra-diegetic function, which let them “to operate” at a structural and narrative level. They are also useful to prefigure or recall characters, facts, or events, proving to be the driving force of the narrative, namely the motor for the action. As far as their depiction is concerned, the objects of gift are supposed to be gendered connoted, apt for the situation and the purpose and appropriate to the giver and the receiver.

They may be classified as parental or inherited gifts, gifts of hospitality and proleptic gifts, even though the different typologies end up intersecting and juxtaposing each other in the poem.

Moreover, the objects of the gift are strictly connected with the cultural category of *laetitia*, persuasion, *fides*, and *honor*, but the most pervasive of all is “memory”. As far as we can infer from the analysis of their literary portrayals, gift-objects exert a mnemonic

²⁸ See WILLIAMS (1962, 157).

²⁹ MACLENNAN (2017, 130-31 ad 154-56) emphasizes the role of memory and its semantic area in the episode.

agency that enables them to link individuals by promoting or creating a network of relationships, to influence their behaviour, to represent or describe a character (the donor, the former owner) and to substitute him/her as a metonymy.

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