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INTRODUCTION

1. VIRGIL'S CAREER AND REPUTATION

Publius Vergilius Maro became a classic in his own lifetime and remained so throughout antiquity, as witness the splendid manuscripts of his works written in rustic capitals and the commentary of Servius (fourth–fifth centuries A.D.) which contains the beginnings of an entire tradition of allegorical exegesis. The profound veneration in which he was held during the middle ages is shown in his 'awakening' by Dante in the *Divine Comedy* – a unique piece of literary homage. To the hierarchic and genre-conscious poets of the renaissance Virgil's became the exemplary model of the poet's career, an ordered progression from humble pastoral to grand epic, imitated by Spenser, whose *Shepherd's Calendar* corresponds to the *Eclogues* and whose epic *The Faerie Queene* begins with a 'reluctant' apology for undertaking heroic verse modelled on the 'ille ego' quatrain quoted by Servius and Virgil's biographer Donatus[1] as the original opening of the *Aeneid*.[2] A similar, perhaps even greater, indebtedness may be seen in Milton, both in his pastoral poem *Lycidas* and in *Paradise Lost*. In the renaissance Virgil was generally regarded as the first and greatest of those who imitated Homer in their own vernacular, inferior to Homer in 'invention' but superior to him in 'art' or style. During the eighteenth century the movement towards naturalism and away from neo-classical formalism, together with a renaissance in Homeric studies after nearly two millennia of Latin-dominated culture, caused Virgil's reputation to decline a little, though it was not seriously impugned; Tennyson's poem 'To Virgil' testifies to his continuing appeal to the romantic sensibility. In 1912 H. W. Garrod[3] wrote 'It is

[1] This work is generally thought to be based on Suetonius, *De uiris illustribus*. A translation is in Camps 111–20.

[2] On the 'cancelled' opening quatrain see Austin's ed. of *Aen.* I, where it is argued that the vv. are spurious (see also Camps 121–3). Conway believed them to have been genuine, but deleted by V. himself, a view which has recently been re-argued by P. A. Hansen, *C.Q.* N.S. 22 (1972) 139–48.

[3] Garrod's essay is in *English literature and the classics*, ed. G. S. Gordon (Oxford 1912).

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a modern fashion to disparage Virgil' and defended him by gestures towards his 'romanticism' – his 'failure to attain', the conflict in his work, 'this quarrel within itself of a mystical and romantic genius working unsatisfied within the limits of a formal classicism, never quite confident, never wholly efficient'. A modern dissentient voice is that of Robert Graves,[1] whose attack on Virgil as the 'Establishment' poet *par excellence*, wholly lacking in originality, humour and vitality, might have been salutary were it not marred by gibes at his lack of military experience and at his (probable) homosexuality. The last word in these frigid and scholastic debates on Homer *v.* Virgil may perhaps be C. S. Lewis's: he pointed out that if Virgil is to be regarded as a bad Homer, then Homer must be regarded as an even worse Virgil.

The main facts of the poet's life are well authenticated and need only the briefest recapitulation here. Born near Mantua in 70 B.C., shy and retiring by temperament, a lover of the country and a student of philosophy, he became the friend of Horace, Maecenas and Augustus. The canon of his compositions, all written in hexameters, consists of[2] (1) the *Eclogues*, or bucolics, ten short pastoral poems modelled on Theocritus, published in 37 B.C.; (2) the *Georgics*, a didactic epic in four books in praise of the Italian countryside and Italian farming, modelled on Hesiod's *Works and Days*, published in 30 B.C.; (3) the *Aeneid*, a patriotic heroic epic in twelve books, begun about 30 B.C., of which the principal models are the two Homeric epics.

To say that Virgil used Greek models is not to deny him originality. Indeed, it is precisely in the way he transcended his models that his originality lies. The Greeks had invented and classified the main literary genres (history, tragedy, pastoral, didactic and heroic epic, etc.) and Roman literary culture was throughout dominated by Greek models. The relationship between the Latin work and its Greek model is primarily generic: the Roman writer learned from his exemplar what kind of thing might be put in, or must be left out, in order to preserve the decorum proper to the genre. Greek literature also set standards of excellence in each of the genres which the Romans sought to emulate. In no other sense, however, can Virgil's

[1] *Oxford addresses on poetry* (1962) 29–53.
[2] None of the poems in the so-called *Appendix Vergiliana* can with certainty be ascribed to V.

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works be said to be 'like' their models, least of all when he is imitating a particular episode or effect: indeed, when we speak of 'imitation' we should more properly speak of allusion; Virgil, like most Roman writers, wrote primarily for a learned and sophisticated audience, who, recognising the sources of a passage, would be equipped to appreciate how Virgil had synthesised and transcended them. Moreover, not only the Latin temper, but the Latin language and hexameter, are unlike the Greek. Virgil's three compositions are more like each other than they are like their various models, being unified by the personality and style of their author. In his mixture of charm and high seriousness, his sense of landscape, his profound sensitivity to the light and shade of human life, the *breue et inreparabile tempus*, in his ability to convey intense feeling, he is quite unlike his Greek predecessors, even the Alexandrian writers of the Hellenistic era who were so fashionable in Rome in his time; for although these writers to some extent anticipated and inspired Virgil's *Kunstsprache* and his romanticism, they contributed nothing to his patriotism, his sense of Rome's moral destiny, *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*. That sentiment, and many others in Virgil, seemed to later readers, from St Augustine onwards, to have more in common with the formulas of the about-to-be-inaugurated Christian era than with the culture of Greece. Above all, Virgil differs from the Greeks in his *tone*, and in his attitude to life, war and suffering. This might best be illustrated by a detailed study of the magnificent eleventh book, the most 'Iliadic' in the poem and yet the least Homeric. A single example from that book must suffice. Aeneas is speaking at the funeral of Evander's son Pallas, who had been entrusted to his care at 8.514–17:

> non haec Euandro de te promissa parenti
> discedens dederam, cum me complexus euntem
> mitteret in magnum imperium metuensque moneret
> acris esse uiros, cum dura proelia gente.
> et nunc ille quidem spe multum captus inani
> fors et uota facit cumulatque altaria donis,
> nos iuuenem exanimum et nil iam caelestibus ullis
> debentem uano maesti comitamur honore. (11.45–52)

'Ille' in 49 is Evander who does not yet know that his son is dead. Virgil draws intense poignancy from the contrast between the father's

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ignorance, his empty prayers for his son's safety, and the reality of the funeral cortège. The Iliadic model for this dramatic irony is that moment in book XXII when Andromache, unaware that Hector is dead, prepares his bath. Virgil has altered the homely and domestic preparation, so typical of Homer, into something characteristically Roman, a religious rite.

When Virgil died at Brindisi on his way home to Italy from a visit to Greece, in 19 B.C., the *Aeneid* was more or less finished, but he had intended to spend a further three years revising and improving it before devoting the rest of his life to philosophy. His death-bed instructions that the still unrevised manuscript be destroyed were set aside, and in accordance with the wishes of Augustus the poem was published posthumously to immediate and continuing critical acclaim, seeming to justify even the patriotically hyperbolic enthusiasm of Propertius, *nescio quid maius nascitur Iliade*, the first recorded instance in literary history of 'advance publicity'.

2. THE AENEID

(i) STRUCTURE

Each of the poem's twelve books is to some degree a self-contained composition with its own special tone and theme, and can be read as a separate entity. Yet each book can equally only be fully understood if related to other books and to the poem as a whole. This is not only for the obvious reason that the poem is a continuous narrative, but also because it is so organised that ideas, events, images, echo in correspondence and antithesis from one part to another, in a complex system of parallelism and cross-reference. This 'encyclopaedic' structure is characteristic of epics, which memorialise the world-picture, both historical and symbolic, of the culture which produced them. But the structure of the *Aeneid* surpasses in complexity that of any previous surviving epic and is equalled (if at all) only by the epics of Dante, Spenser and Milton, who all wrote in avowed homage to, or imitation of, Virgil.

That the poet himself planned the work in two linked parts is clear from the words of the second *inuocatio* placed near, but not at, the beginning of VII (37ff.): *Nunc age . . . Erato . . . dicam horrida bella* | . . . *maior*

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rerum mihi nascitur ordo, | *maius opus moueo.*[1] The second part contains the 'greater matter' of heroic warfare; in it Virgil had at last to face the challenge and example of the *Iliad*. The scene is no longer set in foreign lands, Greece and Carthage, location of Aeneas' 'Odyssean' wanderings, but in Latium, in and around Rome. Yet it must be said at once that the commonly repeated view that books I–VI constitute Virgil's 'Odyssey' and books VII–XII his 'Iliad' is an over-simplification. It is of course true that the themes of travelling and fighting dominate respectively the first and second parts of the poem, that these themes are the subject of the two Homeric epics (though reversing the Homeric sequence, since Odysseus' wanderings follow the *Iliad*) and that, just as fighting is a grander and more tragic heroic subject than travelling, so the last six books of the *Aeneid* aspire to the tragic and concentrated grandeur of the *Iliad* rather than to the more diffused atmosphere of the 'marvellous' which characterises the *Odyssey*. But to say, as Highet does (*The speeches of the Aeneid* 187), that the second half of Virgil's epic is Iliadic because it offers a pattern of arrival, combat and victory is to invite the comment that this pattern is no less Odyssean than Iliadic. *Aeneid* II (the fall of Troy), though structurally Odyssean, being a personal reminiscence of the hero's, is wholly Iliadic in its tragic intensity; *Aeneid* V (funeral games) is modelled on *Iliad* XXIII; *Aeneid* XII is both Iliadic in that it re-enacts the Achilles–Hector–Patroclus situation, and Odyssean in that in it Aeneas kills the suitor of his fiancée Lavinia and completes his post-Trojan adventures by assuming the undisputed kingship of the land from which his ancestors once came. Pöschl noted (28) that of the so-called Iliadic books of the *Aeneid*, VII and VIII are the least Iliadic; but he did not note the extent to which VIII is Odyssean, in tone, purpose and structure. Aeneas' journey to Pallanteum and his sojourn with Evander corresponds both to Telemachus' journey to Pylos and sojourn with Nestor and to Odysseus' own sojourn with Eumaeus *in rebus egenis* after his landfall in Ithaca. It also contains reminiscences of another heroic journey, Jason's, the subject of the best-known of the

[1] The central lines of the poem as we have it are 7.193–4, depicting Latinus on the throne of his ancestors: see A. Fowler, *Triumphal forms* (1970) 62ff., where, however, it is admitted that no authorial intention can be inferred from this fact since the poem is unrevised and its total length cannot be precisely authenticated. On the principle of centrality in Latin poetry see Williams, *TORP* 233–9.

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later Greek epics, the *Argonautica* of Apollonius: the magic shield to which Aeneas is guided in book VIII corresponds to the Golden Fleece, though the shield itself is an Iliadic object, being modelled on Achilles' shield in *Iliad* XVIII. At the moment when Aeneas gazes on it, the poem begins to rise to the full Iliadic structure of its last four books.[1]

Various formal and thematic parallels may be detected between the first and second parts of the poem. Carthage in I–IV is the anti-type of Rome in VIII; the fall of Troy in II stands against the beginnings of Rome in VIII; Aeneas' *mésalliance* with Dido in IV is con rasted to his fated alliance (blessed by his first wife Creusa) with Lavinia in VII.[2] A complete set of correspondences and parallels between the two parts is given by Duckworth.[3] Those which involve book VIII are noted where relevant both in the Introduction and the Commentary.

Triadic divisions have also been observed, both in the poem as a whole and in individual books. (Triadic organisation was a common feature of ancient literature, e.g. the odes of Pindar.)[4] Each 'half' of the poem may be seen as a set of three linked pairs of books. The poem as a whole may also be symmetrically divided into three 'blocks', I–IV, V–VIII, IX–XII (Mackail, Pöschl); this triadic structure can be made to yield further correspondences, e.g. between the 'climactic' books IV, VIII, XII.[5] Duckworth has

[1] A full catalogue of Virgil's allusions to Homer is given by Knauer, *Die Aeneis und Homer*. An invaluable English summary of his findings is given by him in 'Virgil's Aeneid and Homer', *G.R.B.S.* 5 (1964) 64–84.

[2] This correspondence – a 'marriage' in each half of the poem – was noted by the renaissance critic Sebastianus Regulus in his Commentary on *Aen.* I: see Fowler, *Triumphal forms* 6, and R. Cummings, 'Two Sixteenth-century notices of numerological composition in the *Aeneid*', *N. & Q.* 214 (1969) 26–7.

[3] G. E. Duckworth, *Structural patterns and proportions in Vergil's Aeneid* (1962) 1–10.

[4] V. made extensive use of the triad: see App. A, Comm. 714–16, 729–31, Fowler, *Death of Turnus* 2, the triple visitation of Allecto in book VII.

[5] Camps, 57–60, argues that V–IX are linked because each contains a major Homeric episode (games, underworld, Catalogue, shield, Doloneia) and because since the events of VIII and IX are partly contemporaneous there can be no break at the end of VIII: cf. Heinze 455, Otis 419. But the break at the end of VIII is a dramatic and psychological climax (Comm. 731) which imposes itself as a major pause in the movement of the poem as a whole, and it seems perverse to set this aside in order to produce an asymmetrical grouping based on an unconnected 'sequence' of Homeric episodes.

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argued that these triadic divisions were mathematically planned by Virgil in accordance with the ratio known as the Pythagorean golden section or 'divine proportion'.[1]

Book VIII has a clearly defined triadic structure which may be set out as follows:

1. 1–369	A. 1–101	(1) 1–17 Prelude: events in Latium
		(2) 18–85 Aeneas in camp: vision of Tiberinus and sacrifice of sow
		(3) 86–101 Aeneas' journey up the Tiber to Evander's settlement of Pallanteum on the site of Rome
	B. 102–369	(1) 102–83 Aeneas' arrival at Pallanteum
		(2) 184–305 Evander tells the story of Hercules and Cacus
		(3) 306–69 The walk round the site of Rome: end of Aeneas' first day with Evander
2. 370–453		(1) 370–406 The beguiling of Vulcan by Venus
		(2) 407–23 Vulcan's journey from Olympus to the Cyclopes' cave
		(3) 424–53 The forging of the arms
3. 454–731		(1) 454–584 The next day: Aeneas' farewell to Evander
		(2) 585–625 Aeneas' ride to Caere: Venus presents the arms
		(3) 626–731 The description of the shield.[2]

[1] *Structural patterns, passim.* This theory was first put forward *à propos* the *Georgics* by Le Grelle: see L. P. Wilkinson, *The Georgics of Virgil* (1969) 318. But although a knowledge of Pythagorean number-symbolism was assumed by ancient writers (see, e.g., the end of Plutarch's *Life of Theseus* 36), there is no evidence that 'divine proportion' was ever used as the basis of a large-scale literary composition. The numerological hypotheses put forward in recent years in respect of poems by the English renaissance poets, especially Spenser, do not provide a parallel.

[2] This ecphrasis is itself triadic in structure (Comm. 626–731) and ends with a three-line 'coda'.

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But the poem's divisions merely articulate its formal and thematic unity. Like Milton, 'long choosing and beginning late',[1] Virgil finally took as the subject of his heroic epic Aeneas' flight from Troy, his arrival in Latium and his emergence as *dux* and *uictor*. Yet the poem's real theme was seen by its earliest readers to be the origins of Rome and of Augustus, events which lie far apart from each other and far outside the legendary time in which the story of Aeneas is set. Donatus' *Life* makes this clear: 'argumentum uarium ac multiplex et quasi amborum Homeri carminum instar, praeterea nominibus ac rebus Graecis Latinisque commune, et in quo, quod studebat, Romanae simul urbis et Augusti origo contineretur.' Not only was Virgil's literary aim the linking of two cultures, his own and that of Greece; he also had a 'mythographical' aim, the establishment of the legend of Aeneas as the authentic story of Rome's origins, ousting or absorbing all other legends, and a political aim, the linking of Aeneas with the new ruler Augustus. This last aim was achieved by the use of a figurative device which we may call typology: Aeneas is presented in the poem as the prefiguration of Augustus, and the poem's function, like that of the opening books of Livy's history, is not simply to recreate the remote past but to see in that past exemplary parallels with, or paradigms of, the present.

The poem's structure may thus be called both 'teleological' and 'cyclical'.[2] It is teleological because its 'end' or '*telos*' is the founding of Rome and its preservation by Augustus. It is cyclical because until the culminating event represented by the Augustan settlement, the processes of time are seen, as they were seen by all the ancient historians, as a series of 'cycles'. In *Aeneid* 1.267–96 Jupiter foretells

[1] *P.L.* 9.26: cf. the *Life*, 'nouissime Aeneidem incohauit'. The opening of *Ecl.* 6 suggests that V. may have planned an epic on traditional Roman annalistic lines at an early date (cf. Servius on *Ecl.* 6.3): it would, at least, be unwise to dismiss the 'autobiographical' passages in V. as mere imitations of Alexandrian literary convention. The prologue to *Georgics* 3 (Comm. 626–731) further suggests that a subsequent epic was to have been centred on the career of Augustus; V. may have abandoned this in favour of a more Homeric theme in which history should be subordinated to myth, in conformity with Aristotelian theory of the proper nature of poetry: see Norden, *VLZ* 407–15.

[2] These two readings of history are, perhaps, ultimately irreconcilable, and the poem's ambivalence may be in part due to this. On what is said here cf. Otis, 'Virgil and Clio', *Phoenix* 20 (1966) 59–75.

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that peace will be established between the peoples of Latium under Aeneas' descendant Augustus: the personification of Furor, bound and chained like a captive in a Roman triumph (as depicted on Aeneas' shield at the end of the book VIII), ends the prophecy and provides an organising image of the entire poem. In *Aeneid* XII, Jupiter presides over what is only a stage in this dénouement (though it is the point where the poem as narrative ends): the killing by Aeneas of Turnus, the poem's chief, but not sole embodiment of Furor. It is clear from book VIII that, just as Aeneas' settlement of Latium has had earlier prefigurations, beginning with that of Saturn, whose reign in Latium corresponded to the Hesiodic myth of the 'golden age', so it in its turn provides a paradigm of the settlement of Augustus. It is also clear that for Virgil the Augustan settlement is the culmination of a cyclical series: 'hic uir, hic est, tibi quem promitti saepius audis' – the 'Messianic' tone of these words in *Aen.* VI and of Jupiter's *imperium Oceano, famam qui terminet astris* in *Aen.* I, was adapted by Milton in *Paradise Lost* to describe the coming of Christ. We need not attribute any 'prophetic' intimations to Virgil: it is only necessary to note that the Greek concept of the 'saviour', the mortal hero deified after death, was widely current in the last centuries before Christ; the myth of Hercules, which has a central place in *Aeneid* VIII, is the most famous embodiment of this idea. But it cannot be denied that in the *Aeneid* Virgil seems to have transcended the cyclical view of history. For him the value of the past lies in the fact that it leads towards a divinely-ordained goal, the triumphant fulfilment by Augustus of that 'empire without end' prophesied by Jupiter in *Aen.* I: the return or restoration of the golden or 'Apollonian' age which Servius, in his commentary on the fourth Eclogue (Virgil's famous pastoral vision of the golden age restored), saw as the 'ultimum saeclum', the culmination of a cycle.

With what should happen after Augustus the *Aeneid* is not concerned. The events towards which the poem moves (Augustus' victory at Actium and subsequent triumph) are not 'final'; even with regard to Augustus (the untimely death of whose heir Marcellus is lamented in book VI) it is only proper to speak of 'an end'. The word *finis* occurs often in the poem in reference to the promised 'end' of Aeneas' labours and of Juno's hostility towards what is ordained

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by destiny and by Jupiter as the agent and co-ordinator of destiny. The lives and deeds of heroes must end with their deification: only an abstraction, *imperium* itself, the Roman mission to rule, is said in the poem to be 'without end'.

It is of the nature of all epic poems, even Homer's, that they can be read on more than one level, that is, allegorically. Virgil, like most of his contemporaries, hoped and believed that under Augustus those ideals of order and civilisation towards which man continually aspires would be more fully realised than under previous régimes. The vision which sustains and dominates the *Aeneid* is the closing of the gap between aspiration and achievement, the transcendence, with divine aid, of man's limitations. For the modern reader, who has lived through the decline and fall of other 'empires without end', the poem's greatness lies, perhaps, in a sense that this ultimate vision trembles perpetually on the brink of realisation. The doubts and criticisms which the poem as a political statement raises are embodied in, and become part of, the poem's larger meaning as a statement about the moral evolution of mankind.

When we have said that Aeneas is a type or prefiguration of Augustus we have, after all, done very little to explain why the *Aeneid* is still a great poem in the twentieth century, which cares no more for Augustus than for Aeneas – perhaps, if anything, rather less. For all its facetiousness, W. H. Auden's poem 'Secondary Epic' which condemns Virgil's art as a 'muse betrayed' by subservience to the Augustan political programme, offers a salutary if unintentional *reductio ad absurdum* of the argument that the *Aeneid* sees nothing beyond that programme and that its effect is therefore nullified by history. Virgil's sense of the past continually checks and modifies his vision of the future. The ruins of former settlements which Evander shows Aeneas in 8.355–7 comment with silent yet eloquent irony on the *urbs mansura* and show that all political solutions are 'for the time being'. Moreover, although the *Aeneid* is an epic poem on the traditional heroic theme of war, no poetry, not even Wilfred Owen's, has expressed an intenser hatred of war. For Virgil, the desire to kill is, quite simply, insane, and he says so, of Turnus, in book IX: *furor*... *caedisque insana cupido*. It is with violence, death, and sacrilege that the poem ends. We have to turn back to book I to remind ourselves of Jupiter's prophecy of peace, when

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