
The epic successors of Virgil

A study in the dynamics
of a tradition

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	page	xi
1 Closure and continuation		1
2 Sacrifice and substitution		19
3 Heaven and Hell		57
4 Succession: fathers, poets, princes		88
<i>Bibliography</i>		120
<i>Index</i>		124
<i>Index of passages discussed</i>		126

CHAPTER

I

Closure and continuation

The epic strives for totality and completion, yet is at the same time driven obsessively to repetition and reworking. From this contradiction arise the specific dynamics of the epic tradition within the general mechanisms of imitation and tradition in ancient literature; it is a contradiction that is present in a particularly acute form in Virgil's *Aeneid*, yielding a tension that energizes the epics of the first century A.D. and continues to inform such Renaissance works as Vida's *Christiad* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

In the case of the Homeric epics the totalizing impulse is perhaps perceived more clearly in the later Greek interpretation of the poems than in the texts as they might present themselves to an 'unbiased' modern eye. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* become the central cultural and educational documents of Hellenism, and interpreters both naturalistic and allegorical work hard to make of them universal poems adequate to their pre-imposed function as cultural and scientific blueprints.¹ For the committed Homerist, which is almost to say, for the committed adherent to Hellenic values, there is a text for everything in Homer if you only know how to read him. But it is already significant that two poems, rather than one, were selected as the pre-eminent monuments of the beginning of the tradition; the *Odyssey* is the successor to the *Iliad* in ways that still absorb critical debate.

The *Aeneid* is at one level a colossal exercise in definition, seeking to define the Roman epic as the new *Weltgedicht* through an act of appropriation or of literary imperialism, whereby the world of Greek culture and literature (understood as the realization of what was always potentially present in Homer) is pressed into the service of the new age in

¹ See Hardie (1986), ch. 1.

Rome; the poem seeks also to define the limits of that new age both in politico-historical terms and more crudely by marking out the boundaries of Roman geographical expansion as coextensive with the limits of the human and even of the natural worlds. The *Aeneid's* claim to totality is, on the surface, far more strident than anything in the Greek tradition, and also qualitatively different in that it is pushed beyond the cultural and literary spheres into the ground of history itself. The pretensions to closure are awesome; Virgil, it is said, claimed that he was not in his right mind when he set out to write the *Aeneid*, and, if biographical play may be briefly allowed, his desire that the work be burned after his death may reflect, beyond the reported fact that three more years of polishing yet remained, a more general anxiety about the possibility of setting a *finis* to such a poem.

In its present state (and no doubt in any conceivable state of 'completion') the *Aeneid* constantly works against its own closure, remaining a text that is for ever open to new readings. I shall argue that some of the most important in that open-ended series of readings are constituted by the epics of Virgil's successors. Among twentieth-century critics, attention to the conflict between the pressure to totalize, to finalize, and the pull to leave endings open has concentrated on the political and historical aspects of the *Aeneid's* epic 'definitions', whence the monotonously reductive debate about whether Virgil was really for or against Augustus.

There are other ways of framing the issue. Totality may be viewed either temporally or spatially. Epic's relation to time has always been problematical; as the main narrative genre it cannot escape time, and in the Homeric paradigm time is thematized in the awareness of narrator and audience that the narrative time is in a distant past, in an age other than, and different from, their own. Virgil's peculiar construction of an ideology for the present day through the narration of the legendary past attempts to forge a continuity, even identity, between the times of narrated events and narrating. This strategy of course must highlight the vast processes of change that lead from past to present; Virgil's self-imposed task, breathtakingly, is then to persuade us that with Augustus these processes are brought to a conclusion. The poetic symbol of this immobilization of history which, if successful, would indeed make of the *Aeneid* the final epic, is the Golden Age. But while the Christian epic may find ultimate rest in mankind's final return to the paradisaic state from which it wandered, in Rome, where eternity is envisaged as of this

world, a world identified with the 'eternal city', history has a way of taking its revenge. In mythological terms the singular achievement of Augustus is to realize a repetition of the Golden Age, that dream of primitive plenitude that was forever unattainable in the present until Virgil ran time backwards in the fourth *Eclogue*. But in the historical world of men gold tarnishes, and the first century A.D. is the history of the repeated annunciation of the return of a Golden Age whose every coming strictly speaking should be the Last Coming.² The difference is that between epic and romance, understanding epic as a form that strives for and attains a conclusion where all has been achieved, and romance as a form that wanders after a goal that is constantly deferred and in which each partial gain is followed only by yet another promise of that goal.³

In spatial terms the Virgilian and post-Virgilian epic attempts to construct a comprehensive and orderly model of the world, but it turns out that such models are inherently unstable. The instability of the Virgilian world is an open-ended invitation for succeeding epic poets to revise and redefine. In chapter 3 I examine the manifestations of this with particular reference to the charting of the locations of Heaven and Hell.

The One and the Many

Epic is a totalizing form; the agents in epic narrative are also expansive, striving for a lonely pre-eminence and ultimate omnipotence. Again the seeds are Homeric, but the full crop is reaped by Virgil and his successors. Instead of totalizing one might talk of 'maximizing': the epic hero is one who claims for himself, and for himself alone, a superlative, in Iliadic terms the accolade of 'best' (of the Achaeans), the disputed title which is the ultimate cause of the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon. 'Best' means, above all, 'greatest' in battle; the *aristeia*, '(deeds of) excellence', is the label attached to the typical Iliadic episode in which one of the great heroes demonstrates his prowess single-handed in battle. In the latter part of the *Iliad* Achilles who, despite his reconciliation with the Greeks, moves into a deeper isolation and self-dependence after the death of Patroclus, strains at the physical limits of the human individual as he confronts natural and divine forces. On the human level the

² Imperial returns of the Golden Age: Gatz (1967), 135 ff. Key passages in the epics (all reworking Virgilian topics): Lucan *Bell. Civ.* 1.61-2; Valerius Flaccus *Argon.* 1.555-67; Silius *Pun.* 3.622-4.

³ See Parker (1979); Quint (1989); Hardie (1992).

reappearance in battle of the individual Achilles succeeds in turning back the host of the Trojans whom the combined remainder of the Achaean captains had been unable to withstand. The *Odyssey* is not, except at the end, about martial pre-eminence, but an excellence that depends less on strength of hand leads to a parallel isolation of Odysseus, the one man who, through a combination of cunning and divine protection, escapes when all the rest of his companions perish on the journey from Troy to Ithaca. This gives to the singular number of the first word of the poem, *andra* '(the) man', an especial force. Finally, back in Ithaca Odysseus must reveal once more the overt strength of the *aristos* in the contest of the bow and the ensuing slaughter of the suitors; the prize of martial uniqueness is marital unity as Odysseus reclaims through force his right to be the sole claimant to the hand of Penelope.

Virgil's Aeneas is not isolated through the loss of all his companions, but many readers find in him a grim figure of the loneliness of power and responsibility. His is also the loneliness of the representative and original ancestor of a race; in him we meet the first clearly defined example of the 'synecdochic hero', the individual who stands for the totality of his people present and future, part for whole. The line of such heroes leads eventually to the Adam and Christ of *Paradise Lost*. Within the local narrative of the *Aeneid* the increasing hyperbole of the last books works to gain our assent to the proposition that there is a supra-individual quality to Aeneas (and Turnus);⁴ the adequacy of one to all is summed up in the description of Aeneas' shield (itself a microcosmic icon) as (8.447–8) 'one against all the weapons of the Latins' *unum omnia contra|tela Latinorum*. This is the Achillean side of Aeneas; the Odyssean theme of the one survivor is inverted in the fate of Palinurus, the one man who dies that many may survive as Neptune demands (5.814–15): 'There will be just one whom you will miss, lost at sea; one life will be given for many' *unus erit tantum amissum quem gurgite quaeres;|unum pro multis dabitur caput*.⁵

Within the *Aeneid* the lengthiest essay in the definition of the Roman hero is found in the Speech of Anchises in book 6; his review of the souls of unborn Romans ends with an apostrophe of Fabius Maximus Cunctator, who is characterized both by superlativeness and by singularity, 6.845–6 'you are the one called "Greatest", the one man who by

⁴ Hardie (1986), 285–91; index s.vv. 'royal metaphor' (a phrase of Northrop Frye's). Cf. also Williams (1978), 199–205 on 'the theme of one man in single combat against a whole army' in Latin epic. ⁵ See pp. 32–3 below.

delaying restores to us the state' *tu Maximus ille es, unus qui nobis cunctando restituis rem*. By name he is 'the greatest', and as such suited to be the one man who single-handed preserved the state. Line 846 is famous as a quotation of Ennius;⁶ this ending to a parade that centres on Augustus ('this, this is the man' *hic uir, hic est* 6.791) seeks to justify by precedent the place within the Roman state of a supreme individual, an *unus homo*, by reference to one of the staunchest upholders of Republican values. It was of course Augustus' claim in 27 B.C. to 'restore the republic' (*restituere rem publicam*). At *Fasti* 1.587–616, on 13 January, the anniversary of the 'restoration of the Republic', Ovid brings Fabius Maximus and Augustus into close association, in an evaluation of the name 'Augustus' bestowed on Octavian on that day: Pompey's cognomen *Magnus* ('The Great') reflected the greatness of his deeds, but 'greater' (*maior*) was the name of his conqueror (Julius Caesar); *Maximus*, the cognomen of Fabius, is the 'greatest' possible name – in terms of human honours, but *Augustus* outdoes *Maximus* since it is a sacred name. One of the etymologies offered by Ovid is from *augere* 'make to increase'. 'Greatest' marks a limit in size, but the expansiveness of the name 'Augustus' is freed from the rules of grammatical degree.⁷

National salvation ensured by the extension over the whole state of the family head's *patria potestas* justifies the synecdochic hero in Virgil. Ovid explores elsewhere the implications of the absorption of the state into the body of one individual. He plays further games with Fabian numbers in the narrative of the Fabii at the Cremera at *Fasti* 2.193–242: one day that saw the death of 306 members of the *gens Fabia*, one family that alone provided the strength of the whole state, a troop of privates any one of whom was suited to be the general (2.195–200). The episode, like Anchises' review of heroes, ends with a near quotation of the Ennian line on the Cunctator, but with a twist (2.239–42): 'For there was one survivor of the Fabian family, a boy below age and not yet able to bear arms, left behind so that in the future you, Maximus, could be born, in order to restore the state by delaying'

nam puer impubes et adhuc non utilis armis
unus de Fabia gente relictus erat,
 scilicet ut posses olim tu, Maxime, nasci,
 cui res cunctando restituenda foret.

⁶ *unus homo nobis cunctando restituit rem*, *Ann.* 363 Skutsch.

⁷ On the play with degrees of *magnus* in Virgil, see Feeney (1986b), 12–13, 24 n. 90.

The key word *unus* is displaced from the great Cunctator on to the single under-age survivor of the *gens* in 477 B.C.: singular greatness is precariously dependent on a single line of descent. This is Ovid's comment on the coda to the Speech of Anchises, the lament for the imperial successor Marcellus, the youth who did not survive.⁸

In the *Metamorphoses* Ovid gears up for the imperial (and poetic) expansionism of the last book by tilting another innocent Ennian quotation in the direction of the *princeps*, as Mars reminds Jupiter of what he had promised in that earlier epic (14.814): 'there will be one whom you will elevate to the blue sky' *unus erit quem tu tolles in caerulea caeli/templa* (cf. Ennius *Ann.* 54–5 Skutsch). Romulus' reward is now due since (808–9): 'The Roman state is firm on its great foundation and its security hangs on *one* ruler',⁹ words which could refer as well to the first *princeps* as to the first king. The singularity of Romulus here stands in relation to duality as well as to the totality of the Roman state. Ennius' emphatic *unus* probably marked in the first place a contrast to the *other* twin, Remus, fated to die. Ovid twists Ennius again by indicating that Romulus' sole rule emerges also from the previous sharing of kingship with the Sabine Titus Tatius (805–6: for the Romans a shared throne is proverbially unstable); this co-regency was the diplomatic solution to the war between Romans and Sabines, whose confrontation, like the quarrel between Romulus and Remus, was one of the events in early Roman history that prefigured the civil wars of the late Republic. In the last book of the *Metamorphoses* Ovid returns to veiled comment on the *unus homo* in the story of Cipus who thoughtfully warns the Roman people that the miraculous horns that he has sprouted mark him out as king of Rome (15.594–5): 'He said "There is here one man who, unless you cast him out of the city, will be king."' Cipus averts from himself and his fellow-citizens the danger of his becoming king by turning himself into a scapegoat, an Oedipus rather than a Romulus.¹⁰

⁸ The 'continuity theme' in this episode and other aspects of the parallel between the *gens Fabia* and the imperial dynasty are excellently discussed by Harries (1991). The numerical conceits are already present in Ovid's source, Livy 2.49; Livy also extends Fabian 'uniqueness' to the K. Fabius in command of an army against Veii in 481 B.C. (2.43.6) 'Fabius had rather more trouble with his citizens than with the enemy. That one man, the consul himself, upheld the state (*unus ille uir, ipse consul, rem publicam sustinuit*), which the army out of hatred of the consul did its best to undermine' (note the context of civil discord). On Marcellus, see p. 92 below.

⁹ At line 809 I read *et* rather than *nec*, for the reasons sketched out above.

¹⁰ See Feeney (1991) for discussion of the way in which Ovid's treatment of Julius

In the imperial epic of the later first century A.D. (as in the historical empire) the 'one man' remains a problem, most starkly in Lucan where the Republic is destroyed by the struggle between Caesar and Pompey to become that one man. The 'maximizing' hero and the 'totalizing' historical stage collide in the paradox of 1.110-11: 'Rome's greatness, which owned the sea, the earth, the whole world, was not big enough for two men.' Pompey has as cognomen *Magnus*; this is the occasion for a wide-ranging play on the adjective and its comparative and superlative degrees *maior*, *maximus* that places the nature of Pompey's heroism within the epic's generic obligation to be 'big, great' ('greater' than its predecessors, even 'greatest').¹¹ The *Bellum Ciuile* is a superb study in the way that the illusions of power turn into reality, in what one might call the danger of the representative principle.¹² Individual leaders become many-handed monsters because of the obedience of a mass of other individuals. Lucan, following Livy and Ovid, plays with the opposition or coincidence of 'general' *dux* and 'soldier' *miles*. In the mutiny in *Bellum Ciuile* 5 Caesar is abruptly reminded of the fiction on which his power rests (5.252-4): 'Lopped of so many hands and left with almost nothing but his own sword, the man who dragged so many nations into war realised that drawn swords belong not to the general but to the soldier.' Conversely in the desert march of book 9 Cato paradoxically becomes a true *dux* by making himself a *miles*, voluntarily sharing all the privations of his troops (9.401-2).¹³ It is the individual Pompey who is decapitated, but this is equated with the loss of Rome itself as 'head of the world' *caput mundi* (9.123-5). The final standard of Pompey's heroism is his ability to abdicate his political representative status; it is weakness that leads him to abandon control of his cause by yielding to Cicero's rhetoric before Pharsalia, but it is (a passing moment of) strength when later (7.659-64) he attempts to offer himself as a substitute victim for Rome, diverting the gods' wrath from the state to that other supra-individual entity of which he is the head, his own family.¹⁴ It is of course not Pompey but Caesar who becomes, by the traditional epic standards of military and political power, 'greatest', 'the one man', the imperial Everyman without whom there is no independent action; this is expressed

Caesar and Augustus in the *Metamorphoses* reveals 'the appropriation of the corporate by the individual' (213).

¹¹ Feeney (1986a).

¹² On this, and much else of relevance, see Henderson (1988).

¹³ See also 7.87-8; 7.250-4. ¹⁴ See pp. 54-6 below.

in the sudden withering of the traditional organs of state into the one body of Caesar on his entry into Rome (3.105–9): ‘The consuls did not sit radiant in their hallowed seats, nor were the praetors, constitutionally second in power, present, and the curule seats were empty. Caesar was everything (*omnia Caesar erat*); the senate was present as witness to the voice of a private man.’¹⁵ Much of the hyperbole of the *Bellum Civile* is based on the ‘one against all’ or ‘one for many’ principle; the supreme emblem of this is the *aristeia* of the Caesarian Scaeva in book 6 who single-handedly fights off a Pompeian army (6.140–2): ‘A position that could not successfully be taken with a thousand squadrons nor by Caesar in full force, was snatched from the victors by one man’ *quem non mille simul turmis nec Caesare toto|auferrer Fortuna locum uictoribus unus|eripuit*. Here the *totus/unus* contrast is heightened by the paradoxical application of the epithet of totality to an individual; when Caesar is already *omnia* then the superior power of the *unus* Scaeva is indeed terrible.

In the *Thebaid* of Statius emphasis is shifted away further (in comparison with Lucan) from singular pre-eminence to the paradoxes and confusions of duality. Neither Polynices nor Eteocles succeeds in realising a Caesarian or Catonian uniqueness, but, to an extent, the secondary character Tydeus becomes the repository for the *unus/omnes* conceits of the earlier Latin epic tradition, both in his single-handed massacre of the Theban ambush at the end of book 2 and in his *aristeia* in book 8. At the orgiastic climax of incestuously doubling violence in book 11 Statius uses the language of the one and the many in what amounts to a condemnation of epic’s power to memorialize singular events (11.577–9): ‘In all lands and for all time may one day alone witness this crime; may this infamous prodigy fall from the memory of posterity, and kings alone recall this battle’

omnibus in terris scelus hoc *omnique* sub aevo
uiderit *una* dies, monstrumque infame futuris
excidat, et *soli* memorent haec proelia reges.

In Silius’ *Punica* the rhetoric of one and many, of great, greater and

¹⁵ Epic hyperbole finds an echo in Seneca’s advice to a prince, *De Clementia* 1.5.1 ‘you are the soul of your state, it is your body’, quoted by Kantorowicz (1957), 215 n. 65. In a suggestive ‘Epilogue’ Kantorowicz raises, without fully answering, the question of how far medieval ‘corporationist’ theories of the prince in which the state is viewed as ‘the supra-individual collective body of the Prince’ (218) are indebted to antique models.

greatest, is brought back into line with Republican values. In book 6 Regulus is established as a paradigm for Republican ‘greatness’, the ‘greater’ the more ready he is to sacrifice, or ‘devote’, himself for the public good.¹⁶ His name itself is perhaps significant, ‘little king’, the greatest Roman hero of his day but who presents the least risk of aiming at sole rule. The model of Regulus is immediately imitated by Fabius Cunctator: Silius runs through the *unus/omnes* theme at the beginning of book 7, firstly in his own proem to Fabius’ exploits, and secondly in Cilnius’ narration to Hannibal of the story of the 300 Fabii. The book starts with reworkings of the Ennian, Virgilian and Ovidian models (7.1–8): ‘Meanwhile Fabius was the sole hope in the state of panic . . . His mind greater than human took no account of spears, swords and war horses; against so many thousands of Carthaginians and their invincible leader, against so many armies he went forth alone, and in himself he embodied all the arms and men of Italy:’

interea trepidis Fabius spes *unica* rebus . . .
 sed mens humana *maior* non tela nec enses (5)
 nec fortes spectabat equos: tot milia contra
 Poenorum inuictumque ducem, tot in agmina *solus*
 ibat et in sese *cuncta*¹⁷ arma uirosque gerebat.

In *arma uirosque*, with its allusion to the first words of the *Aeneid*, we see a hero who embodies whole epics (outbidding the *Aeneid*’s ‘arms and the (singular) man’). The comparative *maior* both reminds us of Regulus’ magnification and points to the superlative *Maximus* that is in every sense Fabius’ proper name. But this singularly great hero has as his goal the curbing of excess through the defeat of Hannibal, whose epic (Caesarian) pretensions he deflates through the imposition of ‘limit’ *modus* (7.12) and an ‘end’ *finis* (13) by his own control, *moderamen* (15). As the true Republican hero Fabius has the virtue of his ancestor Hercules but none of the tendency to transgressive excess – unlike Hannibal who is soon seen in one of his most expansive moods, boasting of the flight to the ends of the earth of the Roman generals and wielding an Achillean shield emblazoned with a representation of the whole universe (7.96–122). The prisoner Cilnius who tells Hannibal about Fabius plays the numbers game with the story of the 300 Fabii and the war with Veii: three hundred whose expansive *uirtus* did not allow the

¹⁶ *maior, maius*: *Pun.* 6.416, 426, 533. On *deuotio* see pp. 28–9 below.

¹⁷ In line 10 we have the Ennian and Virgilian *cunctando*; *cuncta* in line 8 looks like a tease. Silius suggests a pun in Ennius’ and Virgil’s *unus . . . cuncta-ndo*.

enemy the chance to make a full tally of the number of the *uiri*, each one of whom was 'second to none in their courage' (7.55). But Fabius Maximus alone is more than a replacement for those three hundred who were more than three hundred (63-4).

One and Two¹⁸

The totalizing or maximizing tendency of the epic is always threatened by the possibility of division within the totality or of rivalry for the superlative. The *Iliad* tells what happens when the authority of the supreme commander of the Achaeans is challenged by a second claimant to the title of 'best'. The epic power struggle constantly throws up doubles; the Latin epic greatly extends this innate tendency of the genre, because of the dualities that structure political power and its dissolution at Rome. The founding myth of the city, of the principate and of civil war is the Romulus and Remus story: Rome arises out of the violent replacement of a twosome by a unique founder.¹⁹ With the expulsion of the last Tarquin, monarchy is replaced by the dyarchy of the consuls, not always a perfectly harmonious twosome (consular discord is a particular theme of Silius); the increasing tensions within the Republican consular system lead eventually to the submersion of dyarchy in the uncontrolled divisions of civil war, which in turn are patched over by another monarchical regime, although Augustus will maintain the Republican consular dyarchy as a constitutional fiction. Brothers, harmonious or discordant, continue to be a theme in the history of the first-century imperial household: Tiberius and Drusus, Gaius and Lucius, Nero and Britannicus,²⁰ Titus and Domitian.

In the next chapter I examine the phenomenon of the epic double with the help of a particular theory of the origins and function of sacrifice, that of René Girard; here an example will suffice from the divided world of Lucan's *Bellum Ciuile*.²¹ Here civil war cleaves apart a Roman state

¹⁸ For parallel phenomena in later epic (doubtless to an extent a reflection of the classical models here discussed), see Fowler (1964), 7 ff., ch. 2; Shoaf (1985).

¹⁹ For speculation on connections between the Romulus and Remus story and the dual organization of early Rome, see Cornell (1975), 29-31. See also Alföldi (1974), ch. 6 'Zweiteilung und Doppelmonarchie'.

²⁰ Tac. *Ann.*13.17 (men at the funeral of Britannicus) 'thinking of the discord of brothers in ancient times and the impossibility of a partnership on the throne'.

²¹ Masters' seminal work (1992) is the first to reveal fully the extent of the play of duality and doubles in Lucan. The gladiatorial pair, a dominant image in Lucan, functions as another parody of the consular duality. On division and duality in Statius, see now the dazzling essay by Henderson (1991).

which is on the point of becoming a true cosmopolis, a unified world-state, through the success of Roman arms against outside enemies; Roman *uir-tus* is as expansive as the epic *uir*. The *concordia* that should be the mark of the constitutional division of supreme power between the two consuls turns to *discordia* when the two supreme men (now not as consuls but as a parodic imitation of that institution created when the third member of the triumvirate, Crassus, is killed) agree to disagree and to contend for sole power, monarchy. But even as Caesar succeeds in wresting that power to himself, and as Pompey fades away, another version of the duality is established, in the opposition of the figures of Caesar and Cato, or of the Principate and the Republic. One of the distorting effects of the power struggle is to turn the representative of the free Republic into a parody of the tyrannical Caesar as Cato becomes another *unus homo*. In book 2 Cato would see his representativeness as that of Palinurus, the individual sacrificed for the common good.²² But there is something megalomaniac in Cato's altruism; on his march through the desert in book 9 he tries to live up to an Aeneas' protective concern for his men, but the narrative is taken up with a catalogue of deaths of members of the rank and file, as vulnerable as the companions of Odysseus. Eventually, after the present ending of the poem, Cato will die as literally the 'one man', as the last Republican, the sole survivor of his race.²³ What will be left will be Caesar – everything but nothing, the living corpse of Rome.

The continuation of epic

Imperial Latin epic takes to an extreme the innate tendency of the genre to the expansive and the comprehensive; yet it does not escape from the contrary pulls towards continuation and repetition that deny to even the most arrogantly hyperbolic epic the possibility of making a final and all-inclusive statement.

Homeric epic in its oral phase exists only through the possibility of reworking at each new performance. The monumental fixation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* perpetuates large and unified structures which are nevertheless still subject to the quality shared with the shorter recitations presumably typical of the main oral phase, of being parts of a larger whole, the entire time-span of the legendary and historical actions of men

²² See pp. 32–3 below.

²³ Ahl, Davis, Pomeroy (1986), 2502 for Rome reduced *again* to one man in Lucan's Cato, as originally in Virgil's Aeneas.

and gods; ἔνθεν ἑλώων is the phrase that describes how the epic poet 'picks up' the story at a particular point (*Od.* 8.500), to end at a point where he or another may resume in the future. 'For practical reasons, and also in keeping with its own deliberate style, the art form is always calculated for continuation; it does not aim at formal conclusions in which its movement comes to a stop.'²⁴ The two Homeric epics are part of the epic cycle, which is to say that they both continue and will be continued by other narratives; this is very clear in the alternative two lines at the end of the *Iliad*, 'so they busied themselves with the funeral of Hector, and there came an Amazon, daughter of great-hearted man-slaying Ares', where the arrival of Penthesilea introduces the next epic, the *Aithiopsis*. From the point of view of certain ancient scholars, the *Odyssey* already continues itself, for Aristophanes and Aristarchus are reported to have said that the end of the poem is to be located at 23.296.

Virgil's choice of epic subject-matter transforms the role of continuation. The *Aeneid* may be thought of as the first epic in a new, Roman, epic cycle, the final work in which would be the *Augustiad* that Virgil chose not to write. The full cycle, if realized, would be a series of epics that together covered the same span as the single-epic *Annals* of Ennius, from the Fall of Troy down to the poet's own day. In a sense, of course, the cycle is already realized within the *Aeneid* because of the peculiar way in which the narrative of Aeneas manages by various devices to narrate simultaneously the whole of the future history of the descendants of Aeneas. After the *Aeneid* epics on Roman historical subjects inevitably read as a part of that cycle defined by Virgil, either working with or against the predominant features of the Virgilian outline; the former in the case of Silius' *Punica*, the latter in the case of Lucan's *Bellum Ciuile*. Insofar as the *Aeneid* performs in other ways the all-inclusive function of the *Annals* of Ennius, it reasserts its quality as a totalizing epic; but it also manages to leave itself open to continuation. This is partly the achievement of the end of the poem, which as so many have felt is not an ending at all (except for Turnus), merely the beginning of the history of the Aeneadae once they have vindicated their right to settle in the land of the future Rome. The end is also a beginning in another sense, in that the final picture of Aeneas hot in anger is scarcely to be distinguished from the Aeneas hot in anger who first leaps into his own narrative on the night of the Sack of Troy in book 2 – or from the incensed Juno who launches

²⁴ Fränkel (1975), 14.

the action *in medias res* at the beginning of the first book. This ring-composition is a structural imitation of features in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but executed in such a way as both to affirm and frustrate our sense of an ending.

The classic example of an epic ending that is a beginning is the close of *Paradise Lost*, that starts the 'heroes' off on the epic journey of mankind from paradise lost to paradise regained as Adam and Eve 'Through Eden took their solitary way'. At this point, *after* a poem that has, in Marvell's words, comprehended 'Heaven, hell, earth, chaos, all', and whose various actors have approached a synecdochic or representative totality, we are left with a pair of individuals, now truly alone until the final reintegration of the human race through redemption, and for whom 'The world was all *before* them'. The self-conscious play on beginnings and endings had been taken up with gusto by the ancient imitators of Virgil. Ovid introduces the *last* book of the *Metamorphoses* with the long Speech of Pythagoras that reworks the Speech of Homer with which Ennius introduces the *first* book of his epic. Here the gesture is primarily one of closure: Ovid's 'epic' makes a bid to be the final and most comprehensive in the line of epics inaugurated by Ennius; but within Ovid's own oeuvre the *Metamorphoses* will be continued by the *Fasti*, the poem on the Roman calendar whose theme is defined by one of the senses of 'my times' *mea tempora* in the prologue of the *Metamorphoses* (1.4), and whose first Roman festival is that of Aesculapius, the god whose introduction to Rome comes almost at the end of the *Metamorphoses*. The linear narrative thrust of the *Metamorphoses* will henceforth be transformed into the cyclical recurrence of the imperial Roman year.²⁵

In the final book of Silius' *Punica* Hannibal sails from Italy to Africa, but as Italy disappears over the horizon he has second thoughts, and turns his ships in their course. This is an attempt to steer the epic narrative back to the renewal of war in Italy; there ensues a replay of the storm which begins the *Aeneid*, and which had also driven Virgil's hero from his course to Italy. But where Aeneas' consequent landing in an alien Africa had marked the beginning of a new series of wanderings whose final goal would be the foundation of Rome, Hannibal's landing in his home country completes the preconditions for Scipio's final and total defeat of Carthage. As with the *Metamorphoses* Silius' concluding return to a beginning strongly asserts the conclusion of unfinished

²⁵ Barchiesi (1991), 6; Hardie (1991c) on beginnings and ends in the Janus episode.

business, the conflict between Rome and Carthage, the thought of which drives Juno into action at the beginning of the *Aeneid*; but insofar as that conflict is but a stage in the longer history to which the *Aeneid* alludes, we are also reminded that the triumph of Scipio Africanus that comes at the very end of the epic is not in fact the end of the story.²⁶ Statius also alludes to the inaugural storm of the *Aeneid* just before the ending of the *Thebaid* in the simile at 12.650–5 comparing the onrush of Theseus against Thebes to the unleashing of the storm winds from Aeolus' kingdom. Here however the violence of the storm is controlled by Jupiter, not Juno, and allusion to *Aeneid* 1 is combined with allusion to the final spearthrow of Aeneas in book 12, like a thunderbolt.²⁷ Closure is emphatic, but at the same time Statius raises once more the question, perhaps left unanswered at the end of the *Aeneid*, of the possibility of distinguishing between just and unjust violence. At the very end of the *Thebaid* Statius speaks of the approach of a new poetic *furor* to fill the sails of an epic performance of the lamentations for the dead heroes, deliberately fostering the impression that this is a to some extent arbitrary suspension of a poem that could be continued (as at 1.15–7 Statius had indicated his excision of a plot for his epic from a Theban history extending far back into the past).²⁸ Looking beyond those funerals we may also glimpse the return of the Epigoni.

Repetition

As a product of the oral tradition epic has a set towards continuation; from these origins it also carries with it the habit of repetition, the repetition of verbal formulas, scenes, themes and structures. The nature and function of Homeric repetition has been at the centre of modern analysis and criticism: repetition drained of significance because its sole purpose is to ensure the smooth running of an oral 'machine' with its standardized parts or repetition charged with the meaning of literary pattern or even of ritual? For the imitators of Homer the question

²⁶ Conversely Silius gives us a version of the *final* duel between Aeneas and Turnus in the encounter of Hannibal and the Saguntine Murrus that forms the climax of the fighting in the *first* book of the *Punica*, 1.456–517.

²⁷ On 'combinatorial allusion', see Hardie (1990b).

²⁸ On the ending of the *Thebaid*, see also pp. 46–8 below.

becomes one of how to accommodate repetition as a mark of the genre with the self-consciousness of the completely literary artist.

Virgil makes a virtue of necessity, taking repetition (though not so much on the verbal level) to an extreme in the *Aeneid*. Meaning here is largely generated through the repetition of situations and actions; as the actors move through space and time they seem condemned to relive the experiences of their pasts.

The function of repetition within the *Aeneid* has been illuminatingly discussed by David Quint in an essay that distinguishes between two forms of repetition, 'regressive repetition' as 'obsessive circular return to a traumatic past', and 'repetition-as-reversal' that allows an element of difference by which that past is mastered.²⁹ Quint well shows how the dominant thrust of the last half of the epic towards a conclusive repetition through inversion of the earlier defeat of the Trojans is complicated by the suggestion in the last scene of the possibility of an indefinite cycle of retaliatory revenge.³⁰ We have already looked at ways in which the *Aeneid* points more openly to repetitions outside the strict chronological limits of the story of Aeneas; the developing repetitions within the plot proper thus define the poem as a segment of a series . . . Augustus. A number of critics have seen here an analogy with the repetitiousness of Biblical typology, an analogy that only holds if Augustus really can be all in all.

The impossibility of circumscribing repetition *within* the *Aeneid* overflows into the 'repetitions' of the poem in the works of the successors of Virgil. This reference outside of the poem also allows for the possibility of other epics to 'complete' or rewrite the *Aeneid*, extending the compulsion of characters (and the poet himself) in the *Aeneid* to re-enact and rewrite the past, their own or others'.

In the *Aeneid* repetition is above all of Troy and events at Troy. War in Italy is, as the Sibyl indicates, a repetition of the Trojan War (6.88–90); it is also the consummation of the Roman epic poet's powers, a 'greater

²⁹ Quint (1991). For this twofold typology of repetition Quint is indebted to Brooks (1985), who in turn draws on Freudian models of repetition. See also Shoaf (1985), 14 ff. distinguishing between 'repetition' (allowing for freedom and originality) and 'reiteration' (sterile return) in *Paradise Lost*; related analyses in Schwartz (1988). For a more pessimistic view of repetition in Statius' *Thebaid* as an 'anti-structure of regression', the product of guilt and revenge, see Henderson (1991), 41.

³⁰ Quint here has the analyses of Girard in mind, on which see further ch. 2.