

THE OPENING SCENES OF THE AENEID

A lecture delivered to the Virgil Society

20th November 1965

by R.D. Williams, M.A.

What I want to do in this lecture is firstly to take you again through the well-known scenes of the first two hundred lines of the Aeneid, drawing attention to the complex richness of the material, showing how densely Virgil concentrates the many themes, levels of meaning, types of imagery, moral values, which sometimes interlock in the structure, sometimes hover round the periphery, sometimes are explicit, sometimes constitute an undefined penumbra around the bright light of the primary meaning. Tamquam aliud agens, 'as if doing something different' was the discerning comment on Virgil by an ancient critic. There is a tremendous contrast between the direct externalised narrative of Homer, his splendidly focussed perpetual foreground, his uninterrupted connexions, his unmistakeable meanings and the method of Virgil, interlocked, multi-layered, of shifting focus, varying perspective, half-emergent background, operating at a multiplicity of levels in a subjective way, and perhaps above everything preoccupied.

I propose then firstly to look at the opening scenes in this sort of way, and then in the second half of the paper to concentrate in more detail on the scene which closes the first movement of the first book, the speech of Jupiter to Venus ending at line 296, balancing and answering the speech of Juno with which the narrative of the poem begins. Many of the points I shall make are well-known: it is with the density of them, their inter-relation and their relative importance where they occur that I shall be primarily concerned:

The Aeneid begins with a statement of its theme, modelled to some extent on the invocations of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. The first word arma calls to mind the martial theme of the Iliad and its opening phrases: 'Sing goddess Muse of the fatal wrath of Achilles, which sent many brave heroes to their deaths'; the second word virumque, defined by the following clause ("the man who came from Troy to Italy"), corresponds with the beginning of the Odyssey: "Tell me Muse of the man of many wanderings, who in his voyaging after the destruction of Troy saw the cities and the way of life of all sorts of men." This initial similarity is immediately reinforced: terris iactatus et alto (line 3, 'storm-tossed on land and sea') recalls the Odyssey, and multa quoque et bello passus (line 5, 'suffering many sorrows in war too') refers again to the Iliad. Thus already, as becomes evident again and again in the poem, we have an indication that the Aeneid is to be based on both of the poems of Homer.

But immediately Virgil adds what is to be new in his poem - the hero is fato profugus (line 2, 'an exile by fate') because of the purpose of destiny, because of the divine intention for the future of mankind, to be achieved through Aeneas and his Roman descendants. Aeneas' mission is to found a city and to bring his gods to Latium, to be the ancestor of the Latin race and the fathers of Alba and the city of Rome. Two things only are said at this stage about the nature of his mission: it involves founding a city and bringing his

gods to Latium. The mission of Rome is to be the civilisation of the world, and it is because of her right relationship with the gods that she is chosen as the divine instrument. This is the thought of Horace too, writing at about the same time (Odes, 3.6. 5-6.)

Dis te minorem quod geris imperas:
hinc omne principium, huc refer exitum.

"Because you are servants of the gods, you are rulers on earth; from this take all your beginnings, to this relate all your ends."

Thus one main theme of the poem is already begun: we are concerned with the heroic world of Homer and also with the complex system of Roman civilisation. This first paragraph is bracketed by the word Troiae in the first line and the word Romae in the last. The Aeneid shows how the one world grows out of the other, and constantly explores the interplay of Augustan and Homeric values. It is an attempted synthesis of human behaviour, of the dynamic individualism of the Homeric world mingled with and modified by the social and political responsibilities of the Roman way of life. The new values are summed up in the epithet of Aeneas, 'pius'; the many shades of meaning of this word are perhaps best defined in some such cumbrous English phrase as 'aware of his obligations'. This quality is foreshadowed as early as Virgil's invocation (line 10) where Aeneas is described as outstanding for his pietas, and it is stressed very often, in this book and afterwards. In Homer Aeneas was god-fearing; but this aspect of him is greatly developed and elaborated by Virgil so that it becomes a key word in the scheme of moral values which the poem explores.

A second main theme of the poem is introduced in the words saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram (line 4, 'because of the mindful anger of fierce Juno'), reiterated in the invocation, and presented in detail in the opening scenes of the poem. This is the theme of set-back and suffering, personified in the hostility of Juno. The whole Aeneid may be seen as Virgil's attempt to harmonise the apparently discordant elements of the human scene, to see whether the qualities and ideals of men in the new Golden Age can in some way make sense of the apparently senseless sorrow and disaster which stand everywhere around, which deter and frustrate the virtuous man in his endeavour to reach the goal for which he strives. The hero of Virgil's poem, insignis pietate, pursues to the best of his human ability a divine mission laid upon him, and yet is beset on all sides by hostility, opposition, difficulty, danger, 'storm-tossed on land and sea,' 'suffering sorrows in war'. Tantaene animis caelestibus irae? (line 11, 'Can there be such anger in the hearts of gods?'). It is a question to which the Aeneid could give only partial answers; but this was the problem which preoccupied Virgil's sensitive mind, and he clearly shows it in his invocation. He does not ask the Muse (as Homer had) to tell of deeds and men, but of the causes of human suffering: Musa, mihi causas memora

In the first passage after the invocation (12-33) we are immediately faced with the hostile elements in the poem. Urbs antiqua fuit...('There was a city of old....'): Virgil begins not with narrative, but with the specific mention of Rome's greatest enemy, Carthage, the favourite city of Juno, which she wants to be ruler of the world (regnum gentibus). But she knows that it is fated that a race will come from Trojan blood to defeat Carthage, and therefore she pursues the Trojans with all her hatred. The relationship of Juno to the fates is left poetically vague; we know that she cannot prevent what is fated, but at the same time she can do so much damage that perhaps the outcome may in some way

be vain and fruitless unless she can be combatted. She stands then, on the historical level, for Carthage; next we hear of the mythological reasons for her hatred, the judgment of Paris by which Venus was preferred to Juno in the contest for the golden apple. Mythology plays a very large part in the following scenes too, those between Juno and Aeolus. The epic is coloured with all the available beauty, majesty, and terror of the well-known world of imagination, of Olympian deities, of Greco-Roman myth. Behind these two levels of meaning on which Juno's acts have significance lies the third; this is the 'oblique', the 'symbolic', in which the myth is rationalized, the history universalised, and the goddess seen to portray in some sense the permanent forces of hostile nature, the alien environment, the forbidding circumstance that seeks to 'fret the pygmy body to decay'.

For all these reasons then on different planes Juno intends to harass and oppress the Trojans: tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem (line 33, 'so great a task it was to found the Roman race'). This famous line which concludes the introductory section of the poem contains, paradoxically, a hint of an answer to the problem of human suffering. The great achievement can only come about through sacrifices to match the achievement.

Now Virgil plunges abruptly into the narrative (in medias res) at the point which is most suitable for the theme of Juno's hostility to be illustrated in action. The Trojans are just leaving Sicily, almost at the goal of their journey from Troy to Italy, when Juno engulfs them in a violent storm. Imagery from nature is a recurrent motif in Virgil for conveying a mood: storm and calm, darkness and light. The black night of Troy's destruction gives place at the end of Book II to the light of the sunrise as Aeneas gathers his followers to journey with him toward a new future; conversely the bright optimism of the arrival in Italy at the beginning of Book VII is reflected in the calm sunlit description of the first sight of the Tiber, an optimism soon to be dispelled by another intervention of Juno, similar to this one in many ways, but more threatening still as she invokes not the powers of hostile nature but the malevolent spirits of the underworld.

The storm is motivated by the angry soliloquy of Juno, presented in powerful rhetoric as Juno's speeches always are. We see her as a jealous and angry goddess, smarting in slighted pride (as in the invocation: quo numine laeso quidve dolens, 'through what slight to her divinity or what cause for anger...'). Pallas could take personal vengeance - cannot she, she the wife and sister of Jupiter?

The instrument of her action is Aeolus, king of the winds, a minor deity specially associated with Juno. The mythology is presented in rich and sonorous poetry:

hic vasto rex Aeolus antro
luctantes ventos tempestatesque sonoras
imperio premit ac vinclis et carcere frenat.
illi indignantes magno cum murmure montis
circum claustra fremunt; celsa sedet Aeolus arce
sceptrata tenens mollitque animos et temperat iras:
ni faciat, maria ac terras caelumque profundum
quippe ferant rapidi secum verrantque per auras.

'Here king Aeolus in his huge cave controls under his sway the struggling winds and the sounding storms, and confines them in the bonds of their prison house.

Complaining they chafe around the prison gates, filling the mountain with their mighty roar. Aeolus sits high in his stronghold, grasping his sceptre, soothing their spirit, calming their anger; if he did not, they would surely speed away and sweep with them the sea, the sky, and the deep heaven, and whirl them all through the wide air.'

Here a tone poem is built up by the choice of words whose sound and movement coincide with the meaning. Thus the second line is wholly spondaic, and the long words slow the movement and concentrate the attention; there is no action in the line - nothing but the winds and their epithets. By contrast, the next line has a dactylic beginning with a staccato verb, imaging the imperious activity of their master. Then again the winds, another wholly spondaic line, its effect heavily reinforced with the assonance of i and the alliteration of m, continuing over to the alliteration of c in the next line. Finally in the hyperbole of their imagined escape the dactylic start of each line speeds them in thought on their forbidden path. In a descriptive passage of this kind Virgil's vivid visual imagination is reinforced by his musical mastery of the hexameter, which led Tennyson (himself a master of word-music) to speak of him as 'wielder of the stateliest measure/ever moulded by the lips of man.'

The mythology continues with a touch of the baroque as Juno, goddess of marriage, bribes the somewhat unappreciative Aeolus with the offer of the loveliest of her nymphs, Deiopea, in marriage. He releases the winds and Virgil turns now to the real world of nature as he describes the storm (84-91, 102-123) in colourful verse of great rhetorical power and stirring hyperbole. Finally he returns to mythology with Neptune, Eurus and Zephyrus, Cymothoe and Triton. The last scene is a great pictorial tableau (which has often been represented in visual art) of the supernatural powers of Ocean - Neptune raising his serene countenance above the surface of his domain, rebuking the winds, clearing the clouds, moving the Trojan ships off the rocks with his trident, calming the sea, and when all is done riding over the waves in his chariot. His action in calming the storm is compared (in the first simile of the poem) with that of a respected and responsible statesman calming the frenzy of a violent mob.

The comparison of an agitated group of people with the agitation of the sea by storm-winds is found as early as Homer (Il. 2. 144 f 'the assembly was stirred like the waves of the sea when the winds sweep down'), and Cicero uses storm metaphors frequently of political life (Pro Milone 5); but there are two new things in this simile. The first is that Virgil has reversed the comparison so that the scene from nature is illustrated by means of human activity instead of the other way round; and the second is that the relevance of the simile to the whole poem is made particularly potent by the use of the key words furor and pietas. As the furor of the storm inspired by Juno is quietened by the serene authority of Neptune, so the furor of irresponsible political behaviour is controlled by the statesman, whose authority depends upon pietas and merita. The statesman is clearly Roman, but we are not invited to particularise further. This simile then is the poem in a nutshell - the exploration of those qualities in a human being which may eliminate furor both in himself and in others.

During the storm we have had our first glimpse of Aeneas: how does he face up to this frightening test of his courage and resource? Quite simply, he cannot face up to it. He is in despair and he wishes that he had died at Troy. The loneliness of his exile is bearing heavily on him; he still has a strong nostalgia for his home, an aspect of his plight to be powerfully presented in Aeneid II, and one in which he differs most sharply from Odysseus, with whom he

has much in common in these opening scenes. Odysseus was returning home to his family and friends: Aeneas had left all his former life behind and was voyaging into the unknown. The frailty of his human personality is deliberately made dominant in the opening scenes, and though he gains in courage and resolution as the poem progresses (and also in self-control) he never reaches a point where he stands unassailable against the buffets of fortune. The Stoic philosophy, even as modified of its extreme elements in first-century Rome, is in the last resort unacceptable to Virgil. Dis aliter visum ('the gods willed otherwise') does not answer Virgil's questions.

We have already noticed parallels with the Odyssey in this first scene: let it be said now that in the whole of this scene and in the greater part of the first book we are constantly reminded of the Odyssey. Of course the use made of situations is different; but the situations themselves, the framework, the episodes, and often the words used are incredibly close to the events of Odyssey 5-8. It is often said that the first six books of the Aeneid constitute Virgil's Odyssey: so they do in the sense that they are about Aeneas' wanderings, but only this first book is really close. Book III, the place where similarity with the Odyssey would be most expected, is close in a few parts but not in most; Books II and IV are not at all Odyssean; Book V is Homeric in some ways, but from the Iliad not the Odyssey; Book VI is Odyssean in its setting, corresponding with Odyssey XI in motivation and some incidents, but the differences are in every respect more striking than the similarities.

What then is the extent of the Odyssean framework in Book I? In broad terms it can be said that more than three-quarters of the book corresponds closely with the episode and incident of Odyssey 5-8, occasionally with elements from elsewhere in the Odyssey, and frequently contains verbal reminiscences of a striking kind. The only parts without an Odyssean parallel are those concerned with the gods: the passage about Juno and Carthage before the action begins (12-33), the prophecy of Jupiter (257-296) and the passage about Venus and Cupid (657-694).

All the rest follows closely the structure of the Odyssey: as I have spoken on this topic before to the Virgilian Society and published a version of that paper in Phoenix, 1963, pp 266 f., I give now only the briefest outline. The storm and Aeneas' reactions are very closely modelled on Od. 5. 282 f: the next episodes recall different parts of the Odyssey - as they had to because Odysseus was alone in Od. 5 and Aeneas is not; the Libyan harbour recalls the harbour of Cyclops, the shooting of stags is based on Od. 10. 156 f, Aeneas' speech o socii.....recalls Odysseus before Scylla and Charybdis in Od. 12. 208.

When Aeneas sets out to explore, his meeting with his mother disguised as a huntress recalls Od. 7 where the disguised Athene tells Odysseus about the people who live there, hiding him in a cloud to improve his chances of reconnoitering; and also recalls Od. 6 where Odysseus meets Nausicaa. The reception by Dido is like the reception by Alcinous: the narrative of the storm (which the readers know about) by Ilioneus is like Odysseus' narrative to Arete. There is a banquet, and a speech of welcome by Dido as by Alcinous: the minstrel sings, once only in Virgil, three times in Od. 8. Dido asks for Aeneas' story and gets it in two books, as Alcinous got Odysseus' story in four (Od. 9-12).

What is the reason for this astonishing similarity? Briefly, I think it is this. Aeneas is in a sense another Odysseus, his contemporary in time, a warrior of the heroic world leaving Troy after its destruction. His qualities are, to begin with, similar to those of Odysseus, qualities of the Homeric world of the brave individual. But they have got to be changed as Odysseus' qualities had not. Odysseus was going home to Ithaca to resume the same life which he had left: Aeneas was journeying out into the unknown leaving the old life behind, with the task of beginning a new kind of life which would eventually lead to a new kind of civilization - a Roman Empire, not a king's palace in little Ithaca. So we see him equated in situation and (often) behaviour with Odysseus in the first book: how do we know he is going to be different? Because of the longest and most important of the three non-Odyssean passages; the conversation of Venus and Jupiter in heaven. Here is the focus on the future - here is the prolepsis of the first book, the utterly non-Odyssean element of the poem. I should like to conclude by taking a close look at this passage.

VENUS AND JUPITER

In one minor sense this passage does remind us again of Odyssey V, for Odyssey V begins with a council in heaven at which Athene complains to Zeus that Odysseus is still held captive with Calypso and that an ambush has been laid for Telemachus: Zeus replies that Athene can deal with the ambush and himself sends down Hermes to tell Calypso that she must let Odysseus go. There is an external resemblance to Homer in the Virgilian passage: Venus complains to Jupiter that Aeneas is being prevented from reaching Italy, and Jupiter sends Mercury to Libya to ensure that the Carthaginians will not be hostile to the ship-wrecked Trojans. But the resemblance is far less important than the difference: the difference centres upon the divinely inspired mission of Aeneas and Jupiter's promise that it shall be so. It is for the safety of Odysseus and the benefit of his family and people on the tiny island of Ithaca that Athene pleads: it is for the Roman gift of civilisation to all peoples that Venus asks, and Jupiter in reassuring her elaborates in unforgettable phrases the nature of this imperial destiny.

The passage begins with a pictorial tableau of Jupiter surveying the world, pondering on the dispensation of divine providence:

Et iam finis erat, cum Iuppiter aethere summo
despiciens mare velivolum terrasque iacentes
litoraue et latos populos, sic vertice caeli
constitit et Libyae defixit lumina regnis.

Venus speaks to him majestic and dignified, mother of Aeneas (quid meus Aeneas...), mother of the Roman race. Her speech is a mixture of controlled indignation and pathos, less vehemently rhetorical than Juno's speech at the beginning of the poem, and less so than her own speeches later in the poem. It contains the statement of Jupiter's promise of world rule for Rome:-

certe hinc Romanos olim volventibus annis,
hinc fore ductores, revocato a sanguine Teucri,
qui mare, qui terras omnes dicione tenerent,
pollicitus. quae te genitor sententia vertit?

As consolation for the fate of Troy, for the destruction of a city, Venus says she has been weighing contraria fata, i.e. the foundation of another city. She contrasts the success of Antenor in founding his new city with Aeneas' apparently

interminable exile. "We Trojans are kept from Italy because of Juno's anger: we, your offspring, to whom you grant the citadel of heaven": nos, tua progenies, caeli quibus adnuis arcem. This is very different from Athene's appeal on behalf of Odysseus. And Venus ends with words which put the vital question of the whole poem - hic pietatis honos? Is this the reward for devotion to duty? sic nos in sceptris reponis? Is this how we regain our lost power? The question hic pietatis honos? echoes what Virgil had asked in his own person in his invocation tantaene animis caelestibus irae?, and it is the question around which the events of the poem revolve. If Virgil had not given us Jupiter's reply to it, we would very often feel that the buffeting of Aeneas and of those involved with and against him was intolerable, senseless, an indication of the injustice of the world. We feel this to some extent in any case: but Jupiter's speech expresses what is purposed for mankind, the great plan of ultimate peace and happiness under the Romans in the achievement of which all toil and all suffering might be seen as a necessary preliminary. I do not wish to say that in Book IV and Book XII we feel that all is explained in the light of the divine plan - far from it; but without this speech of Jupiter both those books would break the back of the poem. Dido and Turnus would then seem to be 'like flies to wanton boys'. There must be a reason for their suffering, even if the reason does not satisfy us, and the reason is provided by Jupiter's speech and its echoes at intervals through the poem, especially in the pageant of Roman heroes in Book VI and the pictures on Aeneas' shield in Book VIII.

The speech is serene and calm - smiling, the father of gods and men reassures his daughter that the destiny of her children will indeed come true, and to banish her anxiety he prophesies the development of the history of the Romans. The first line of prophecy contains the two-fold statement of the Roman mission - first in war to crush proud opponents:

bellum ingens geret Italia populosque feroces
contundet (compare Aen. vi. 853. debellare superbos)

and secondly to set up towns and a way of life:

moresque viris et moenia ponet.

Moenia means a stable, settled, urbanized type of life as opposed to the sporadic life of uncivilised peoples; and mores is a word of very wide application indeed, taken up again in the same passage of Aeneid VI to which I have just referred: vi. 852 pacique imponere morem. Here you have the two-fold concept: pax first, by means of war; and mos afterwards. It is interesting to notice that this aspect of the Roman mission receives modification at the end of the poem, when it is found that the Italians against whom Aeneas fights have much of their own to contribute to the Trojan-Roman destiny, and Jupiter accepts Juno's plea that the Italians should keep their own language (Latin) and their own way of life and become the dominant partners in the Trojan-Italian origin of the Romans.

Sermonem Ausonii patrium moresque tenebunt
utque est nomen erit: conmixti corpore tantum
subsident Teucris. (xii. 834 f.)

But whether the values (mores) be Trojan or Italian or a mixture of both, they constitute the gift of the Romans to the barbarian world.

Now Jupiter sketches in the early history of the Trojan-Romans - three years of rule for Aeneas in Lavinium, thirty for Iulus in Lavinium and Alba Longa: three hundred years of rule there for Hector's people - notice the emotive use of the name of Troy's champion, unequal at the end to Achilles - and then the birth of Romulus and Remus. Twice here Virgil uses his favourite

device of etymology to link the present with the past: Iulus was so called from Ilium, and with the mention of Romulus he adds Romanosque suo de nomine dicet. There is nothing new in this: the she-wolf, the twins, the name of Rome from Romulus were all familiar and comforting to the Roman reader. But what follows is new: 'To these I set no bounds in space and time; I have given them rule without end.'

His ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono:
imperium sine fine dedi.

Observe here how *immense* and final *emphasis* is given to Jupiter's proclamation by the statement of the theme in an end-stopped line, and the variation on it in half a line, all in the precise word order of Latin prose. There is no subtlety here, no embellishment, no verbal decoration, just the unadorned statement of a tremendous fact, later to be reiterated at the end of Book VI:

Tu regere imperio populos Romane memento.

We must not be unmindful of this when Aeneas has to face the problems which it involves.

Jupiter continues by promising that Juno will give up her anger (as she does at the end of Book XII - too late perhaps) and will join him in protecting the Romans rerum dominos gentemque togatam. Here again is the definition of the mission: first mastery over the world, and then the garment of peace.

From the whole of Roman history proper, from 753 B.C. on, Jupiter refers to only two periods. In real history these periods are less than 150 years apart, the subjugation of Greece by Rome in 146 B.C., and the rule of Augustus. But in their effect they span and indeed out-span the whole period of more than a thousand years, between the two extremes of which the Aeneid operates, the period of Aeneas and the period of Augustus. For the defeat of the Greeks in the second century is referred to in terms immediately relevant to Aeneas and the Trojan war: the house of the Trojan Assaracus will bring into bondage Phthia (home of Achilles) and famous Mycenae (home of Agamemnon) and be ruler over conquered Argos. This then is one extreme of the Aeneid's time-scale; the Trojan war, the times of Achilles and Agamemnon and Aeneas. This is the part concerned with the destruction of a city, and it will have its last chapter written many centuries later. The events of Book II - final in themselves - will be expiated in the second century B.C. The point is made again at the end of Aeneid VI, 836 f:

ille triumphata Capitolia ad alta Corintho
victor aget currum, caesis insignis Achivis.
eruet ille Argos Agamemnoniasque Mycenae,
ipsumque Aeaciden, genus armipotentis Achilli,
ultus avos Troiae, templa et temerata Minervae.

Vengeance on Achilles comes only when his (so-called) descendant King Perseus of Macedonia is defeated by Roman military might.

Thus then the topless towers of Ilium ('in one sad night consumed and thrown down') will conclude their history. What of Troy's second self, the Roman descendants based in Italy of Anchises, Aeneas, Iulus? Jupiter's prophecy here goes beyond the time at which Virgil is writing, to the period of the death and deification of Augustus, the point of time at which the Golden Age will return. Conway is surely wrong to accept the view of Servius that Julius Caesar is referred to here: no such peace as is here prophesied followed

his death in fact, nowhere else in the Aeneid does Caesar mean Julius, and in the only place where Julius is directly referred to (6. 835) the reference is to the tragedy of civil war -

tuque prior, tu parce, genus qui ducis Olympo,
proice tela manu, sanguis meus!

The climate of opinion in Virgil's time saw Augustus as doing what Julius had not done, recovering for the Romans all that was valuable in their past.

These closing lines then refer to Augustus; we have a reference to his military achievements, stretching to the Ocean, including the subjugation of the East, and to his finding his rightful place in heaven. And the passage ends:

Aspera tum positis mitescent saecula bellis;
cana Fides et Vesta, Remo cum fratre Quirinus
iura dabunt: dirae ferro et compagibus artis
claudentur Belli portae; Furor impius intus
saeva sedens super arma et centum vinctus aenis
post tergum nodis fremet horridus ore cruento.

Here is Dryden's translation:

"Then dire debate and impious war shall cease,
And the stern age be softened into peace:
Then banished faith shall once again return,
And vestal fires in hallowed temples burn.
And Remus with Quirinus shall sustain
The righteous laws, and fraud and force restrain.
Janus himself before his fane shall wait,
And keep the dreadful issues of his gate,
With bolts and iron bars; within remains
Imprisoned Fury, bound in brazen chains;
High on a trophy raised, of useless arms,
He sits, and threats the world with vain alarms."

There are just one or two points I want to make on these densely packed lines. First there will be universal peace - this is the main message, absence of war, reinforced by the positive terms mitescant, fides, iura. Secondly it is the absence of a particular kind of war which is emphasised, namely civil war. Remo cum fratre Quirinus: the brothers will be united again. We are reminded of that tremendous poem, Horace's seventh epode:

Quo quo scelesti ruitis? aut cur dexteris
aptantur enses conditi?

Think of these lines from the middle of it:

Furor ne caecus, an rapit vis acrior
An culpa? Responsum date.
Tacent et albus ora pallor inficit
Mentesque percussae stupent.
Sic est: acerba fata Romanos agunt
Scelusque fraternae necis,
Ut inmerentis fluxit in terram Remi
Sacer nepotibus cruor.

Here is the reference to Remus, and the use of the word furor. Take Epode 16:

Altera iam teritur bellis civilibus aetas

where in line 9 Horace says we ourselves shall ruin Rome

impia perdemus devoti sanguinis aetas ...

Here is impia in its frequently recurring sense, referring to civil wars, as it surely largely does in Virgil's personification of Furor impius, said to be derived from a picture by Apelles (Pliny, N.H. 35,93) and certainly vivid enough to give a plastic impression.

My last point here is to remind you how the phrase Furor impius summarises the themes which run through the poem: the pietas of Aeneas or of the responsible statesman who, as we saw in the simile, can quell furor, and the constant presence in the poem of furor, that frenzy which can consume the better part of a man's personality, and is characteristic of the Trojan women when they burn the ships, of Dido when she has changed from a serene queen into a self-centred turmoil of passion; of Turnus when he yields to his love of his own valour, of Aeneas himself when he fails (as in Book II and again in Book X) to control himself.

This astonishingly optimistic and serene portrayal of Rome's destiny, nestling so strangely in its Odyssean setting, gets the poem moving with tremendous impetus upon a path which extends far beyond the frontiers of the Odyssey. It is almost too powerful to endure: its radiant optimism seems to transcend the limits of hope. And its function is to shine through the poem as it unrolls, illuminating the dark places of doubt and uncertainty. How could we accept the decision of Aeneas in Book IV if we had not been prepared by these majestic and superhuman prophecies? When Jupiter sends Mercury to Aeneas in Book IV to tell him to leave Dido he says that it was not this that Venus promised when she protected Aeneas, but that he would be the one to rule Italy and bring the whole world beneath the sway of law.

non illum nobis genetrix pulcherrima talem
promisit, Graiumque ideo bis vindicat armis;
sed fore, qui gravidam imperiis belloque frementem
Italiam regeret, genus alto a sanguine Teucri
proderet, ac totum sub leges mitteret orbem. (iv. 227 f.)

These words recall the promises here given in Book I - they resume the theme so powerfully presented here, and they explain what Aeneas must do.

Again in the battle scenes of the poem we find it hard to hold in our minds what sufficient reasons impel the Trojans to fight against the native Italians; this speech is the reason. Now I do not say that our sympathy for those who do not fit into the plan is dispelled: the note of sadness and uncertainty is often powerfully predominant in the Aeneid. What I do say is that without this speech the Aeneid would be unbalanced. It would be a tale of suffering unexplained. As it is, the vision of Rome's greatness provides the motivation and the partial justification for all the actions which arise from Aeneas' attempts to fulfil the tasks laid upon him by destiny. Indeed Tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem, but with Jupiter's speech ringing in our ears, we can see the reasons for which it seemed worth the try.

Aspera tum positis mitescent saecula bellis;
cana Fides et Vesta, Remo cum fratre Quirinus
iura dabunt: dirae ferro et compagibus artis
claudentur Belli portae; Furor impius intus
saeva sedens super arma et centum vinctus aenis
post tergum nodis fremet horridus ore cruento.