

Epic

Introduction to Vergil's *Aeneid*

Topics discussed in this lecture

- General introduction to Vergil
- The epic genre in Rome before Vergil
- Analysis of the proem (1-33)
- Choice of theme and myth
- The renewal of epic: the relationship of the *Aeneid* to Homer's and Apollonius' epics
- The structure of the poem
- Ecphrasis: the description of Dido's palace

Vergil

- Information about Vergil's life (15/10/70 – 20/919 BC).
- The contribution from ancient biographies.
- Literary output:
 - ❖ *Eclogues* (42-37BC)
 - ❖ *Georgics* (36-29 BC)
 - ❖ *Aeneid* (29-19BC)
- Historical context.
- Patronage.

Epic in earlier Latin literature

- L. Livius Andronicus (c. 284-204 BC): Latin translation of *Odyssey* in native Roman metre
- Cn. Naevius (c. 270-199BC): *Punic War* in native Roman metre.
- Q. Ennius (239-169BC): 18 books of *Annals* in hexameters, metre of Greek epic, and thereafter the standard metre of Latin epic too.

Analysis of the proem (1-33)

- What important themes are indicated by the proem?
- What type of epic is this going to be?
- How does Vergil signal to the reader that this work belongs to the genre of epic?
- How does this proem compare to the ones we found in Homer and Apollonius?
- What picture is painted of the gods, what of the poet?
- How is a parallel created between Aeneas and Hercules?
- What is the function of myth?

The choice of theme and myth

- What can we say about Vergil's intentions and choice of theme?
- Why would Vergil not have chosen to sing an epic about Augustus?
- Why did he not prefer to sing about the Romulus legend?
- Why was the Aeneas legend so suitable? See also *Iliad* 20.300-8.

The renewal of epic

- The relationship of the *Aeneid* to Homer and Apollonius.
- The concepts of *imitatio*, *variatio*, and *aemulatio*.
- The importance of genre.

The structure of the poem

- 1-6: *Odyssey* ~ 7-12: *Iliad*
- 1-4: Carthage; 5-8: Sicily and Italy; 9-12: War in Latium
- Symmetrical scheme centred on 6: e.g. 8 Rome > < 4 Carthage; 12 Juno's reconciliation > < 1 Juno's anger
- Similar repetitive scheme: e.g. 7 >< 1 Juno's interventions; 10 Pallas >< 4 Dido; 6 >< 12 predictions of Rome's future.

The description of Dido's palace

- Which scenes from Homer and Apollonius are echoed here? Which motifs are used in all three authors?
- What is the effect of these allusions?
- Why would Vergil have wanted to use Homer and Apollonius for this scene?
- Which elements are new? What is emphasised in the description of Dido's city?
- What does this tell you about the *Aeneid*?
- Why would the temple walls have been described in detail? What does this remind you of?
- How does this 'art gallery' link present with past and future?
- Why would these vignettes been chosen?
- Which themes are emphasised in these pictures?
- What is the climax of the series?

Bibliography specific to this lecture

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