

EPIC CONSIDERATIONS IN THE AENEID AND PARADISE LOST

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The composition of epic poetry was the ultimate intent of both Publius Vergilius Maro and John Milton. Their success is undeniable. The effort of each poet resulted in an epochal poem which placed them in the superior and elite group of epic poets. Vergil's Aeneid¹ served to recount the wanderings of Aeneas and to emphasize while glorifying the Augustan (Julian) line, while Milton's epic, Paradise Lost,² strove to justify, for Milton and his readers, God's ways. Vergil found epic forerunners in Homer's Iliad and Odyssey; knowing that Milton knew Latin as well as English and could speak it as well as he could English, it seems more than probable that Vergil and his Aeneid would influence Milton's epic endeavors. A look at these two epics, at their epic devices and similarities, should prove, it is hoped, worthwhile and interesting.

Both the Aeneid and Paradise Lost are organized into twelve books; however, whereas the Aeneid's action covers many years, the action of Paradise Lost covers only thirty-three days.³ In keeping with epic convention, both poems begin with the statement of theme and the invocation of the Muse. The first book of Paradise Lost finds Satan, with his legions, cast into and fixed in Hell. After some reflection upon his condition, Satan summons his devils from the lake of fire in order to decide upon their next course of action against God. A certain

parallel of Book I of Paradise Lost with Book I of the Aeneid is evident. Aeneas finds himself a foe of Juno as is Satan of God. Satan undergoes, physically and mentally, the hellish storm and turmoil of being cast into Hell, while Aeneas is subjected to a violent and destructive storm, by Aeolus through Juno, on the sea near Africa. After both of these events take place, and with the exception of the construction of Pandemonium (which took only one hour), there is a calming down of the physical action in both books.

Vergil's concern with Hades is delayed until the sixth book of the Aeneid, but the concerns of Paradise Lost necessitate that Hell must be the setting for the first two books. Books I and II of Paradise Lost form a unit of demonic councils and speeches by Satan and his potentates. Books II and III of the Aeneid are unitary in that Aeneas relates, by flashback, the episode of the Trojan horse, Troy's destruction, Aeneas's escape from Troy, and his journey leading up to Carthage.

A little over half of Book III of Paradise Lost is taken up with the council in Heaven (which parallels the demon's council of Books I and II in Paradise Lost). God speaks of Satan's success against mankind, requires a redeemer for man because of his disobedience, and Christ volunteers himself. The major council of the Gods in the Aeneid takes place in the tenth book during lines 1 through 117. Jove gathers the deities together in order to rebuke them for causing the Trojans and Italians to war with each other. Jove forecasts the Punic

war(11.11-15) and verbally scourges the gods for interfering. However, he rationalizes for his neutrality by saying: "Jove is the same to all./Fate will find ways"(11.112-13).

As Kenneth Quinn points out in Virgil's Aeneid: A Critical Description, the division of the Aeneid into three groups of four books is almost as apparent as the division of its books into two groups of six(the first six corresponding to the Odyssey and the last six corresponding to the Iliad).⁴ "Books 1 to 4 form a closely cohering structure, organized around the long flashback of Books 2 and 3--the dramatic moment of the beginning of Book 1; though the narrative ranges over the whole of Aeneas's wanderings, Carthage remains the dramatic setting."⁵ Books V through VIII serve as an interlude between the drama and flashback of the first four books and fighting of the last four books.⁶ "Books 9 to 12 contain the story of the war in Italy: the war is declared at 7.601-22, but the first advance on the beleaguered Trojans does not begin until 9.25, the actual fighting not until 9.503."⁷

"Seen overall--from above, as it were--Paradise Lost is a vast but delicately balanced structure. The adventure of Satan in Books I-III balances the history of mankind in Books X-XII."⁸ Again, I think that Satan's adventure is a conscious connection with Aeneas's ordeal on the sea in the first book and with Aeneas's journey by means of flashback through battle at Troy, his leaving Troy, and his odyssey to Carthage.

"Book IV, the entry of Satan (and the reader) into Paradise, balances Book IX, describing the loss of Paradise."⁹ Books V and VI discuss destruction, with the war in Heaven, while Books VII and VIII deal with Creation and its description along with "the problems of understanding it."¹⁰

Within Paradise Lost's "larger structure, there are all sorts of secondary balances; . . . the Heavenly Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is paralleled by a diabolic trinity of Satan, Sin, and Death."¹¹ Satan's fall from Heaven parallels Adam's fall from Grace.

In order for the Aeneid and Paradise Lost to be classified as epics, not only must they be of great length, and of lofty subject concerned with a hero, his battles, and his wanderings, but also they must adhere to certain established epic conventions. Naming and noting the location should suffice for some of the general conventions: the presence of deities and their intervention is obvious in several places throughout both poems; the description of the hero's armor occurs in Paradise Lost, I.283-98, and in the Aeneid, VIII.608-731; the epic battle takes place in Paradise Lost in book VI, in the Aeneid, Book XI.597 through the end of Book XII.

Both poems begin (as previously stated) with the "statement of theme" and the "invocation of the Muse." The first eleven lines of the Aeneid are used to employ these two conventions. The first sentence (ll.1-7) states the theme:

My song is arms and a man, the first of Troy
 to come to Italy and Lavinian shores,
 a fated fugitive, harried on land and sea
 by heavens huge might and Juno's endless hate,
 pommelled by wars, till he could found the City
 and bring his gods to Latium, whence the race
 of Latins, our Alban sires, and towering Rome.

The muse is invoked in the next sentence:

Muse, tell me the causes: how was godhead wronged,
 how injured the queen of heaven that she must force
 through many a fall of fate and many a toil
 that great good,man: can heaven hold such ill will?(11.8-11)

Milton developed the first twenty-six lines of Paradise Lost into his statement of theme and invocation. The first line of Paradise Lost, like the first lines of the Aeneid, the Iliad, and the Odyssey, refers to a "man." The invocation of the Muse is included in the main section of the statement of theme(11.1-6):

Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit
 Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste
 Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
 With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
 Restore us, and regain blissful Seat,
 Sing Heav'nly Muse. . . .

As did Vergil, Milton left the Muse unnamed; probably, it was to be known that the Muse invoked was "Calliope," the

Muse of epic poetry. However, Milton had in mind, "Urania," the Muse of astronomy. It is logical to appeal to a patroness of astronomy, if a poet should want to describe the universe, creation of the sun and moon, and a planet suitable for founding the race of man. In another invocation, the poet names the Muse in the first line of the seventh book: "Descend from Heav'n, Urania."

Following these two conventions, comes the expository element of the beginning of an epic poem--in medias res (in the middle of things). This device relates some background information and causes the epic poem to begin, not with the initial events concerned with the poem and its hero, but picks up fairly well along into the time when many significant events concerning the hero have taken place. With all this the hero is placed in some kind of struggle.

The Aeneid opens with Aeneas, having wandered for seven years since the Trojan War, battling a raging storm at sea contrived by Juno. As the beginning of Paradise Lost develops, it is learned that a war in Heaven has taken place and that Satan, a negative hero, has been "Hurl'd headlong flaming from th'Ethereal Sky/With hideous ruin and combustion down/ To bottomless perdition, there to dwell/In Adamantine Chains and penal Fire"(I.45-48).

Contained also in the in medias res section is the "epic question,"--an interrogative so as to learn, in the Aeneid, how the "godhead"(Juno) was wronged(I.8) along with what

caused her anger, and in Paradise Lost:

. . . what cause

Moved our Grand Parents in that happy State,

Favor'd of Heav'n so highly, to fall off

From thir Creator, and transgress his Will

For one restraint, Lords of the World besides?

Who first seduc'd them to that foul revolt?(I.28-33)

(I suppose following the "epic question" should be an "epic answer." We learn, in the Aeneid, that the godhead is Juno and that she has been wronged through learning that Carthage, "a spot that Juno loved more than all worlds"(I.15) would be destroyed by men of Trojan blood. The answer to the question in Paradise Lost is "Th'Infernal Serpent . . . whose guile/Stirr'd up with Envy and Revenge, deceiv'd the Mother of Mankind . . ."(I.34-36).

The remaining conventions require no specific order. The "epic flashback" is an important convention because it provides coherency by supplying necessary information about what has taken place in the past leading up to the time when the action in the poem actually begins. Vergil's use of epic flashback involves two entire books(II and III). Dido petitions Aeneas:

Tell me of Priam, tell me! And Hector, too!

The son of Dawn--how blazoned was his shield?

Diomedes's team--what breed? How tall Achilles?

. . . From the beginning tell

how the Greeks tricked you, how your city fell,

and how you lost your way--full seven years
 have seen you wandering over land and sea.(I.750-56)
 Aeneas complies; and with the beginning of the second book,
 he journeys back through the bitter misfortunes which put
 him in Carthage: "But if you want so much to learn our fate,/ /
 to hear in a word how Troy travailed and died,/ /though memory
 makes me shrink and shutter with grief,/ /I'll try"(II.10-13).
 Book II is set in Troy while Book III deals with Aeneas's
 voyage from Troy to Carthage.

Milton's epic flashback begins approximately halfway
 through Book V and continues through Books VI and VII. God
 sends Raphael to Adam in order to warn him of the enemy, Satan.
 Adam listens attentively, but Raphael's warning about Satan
 arouses Adam's curiosity as to what was the state in Heaven
 in addition to what happened before Adam's creation; then
 requests deferentially:

. . . though what thou tell'st
 Hath past in Heav'n, some doubt within me move,
 But more desire to hear, if thou consent,
 The full relation, which must needs be strange,
 Worthy of Sacred silence to be heard. . . .(V.253-57)

Raphael consents in the same sad tone and in a manner which
 echoes Aeneas's reply to Dido in Book II, the beginning of
 Vergil's flashback:

High matter thou injoin'st me, O prime of men,
 Sad task and hard, for how shall I relate

To human sense th'invisible exploits
 Of warring Spirits; how without remorse
 The ruin of so many glorious once
 And perfect while they stood; how last unfold
 The secrets of another World, perhaps
 Not lawful to reveal? yet for thy good
 This is dispens't. . . .(V.63-71)

The flashback passes on through the remainder of Book V and continues through Books VI and VII, while Raphael relates to Adam how Satan organized the battle against Heaven, the battle itself, Satan's defeat by the Son, and finally the Creation.

The "epic games" of the Aeneid and Paradise Lost appear in Books V and II, respectively. Aeneas proclaims the games at line 64 of Book II, and they last through line 603 (II). In Paradise Lost, the epic games, which "entertain/ The irksome hours, till the demon's great Chief return"(526-27) occupy approximately thirty-five lines. "The sports of the demons are an interlude like the funeral games at the tomb of Anchises in the Aeneid(V.103-603) and those at the tomb of Patroclus in the Iliad(XXIII.287-897), but they include contests in music and oratory, as the Olympian and Pythian games did in ancient Greece."¹²

The "catalogue of warriors" is a device used to list the major figures in fighting. Vergil records his catalogue in Book VII.647-817, Milton his in Book I.381-505. Before

the catalogue, both poets again invoke the Muse.

The "epic simile" is the most frequently employed epic convention and allows the poet to exhibit, through long and well-developed comparisons, a wide range of allusions. Epic similes are found in abundance in both the Aeneid and Paradise Lost, stemming from Vergil's and Milton's knowledge of literature and history together with their superior ability to describe elaborately the world around them. In the Aeneid, Vergil masterfully created no fewer than eighty-six epic similes, while in Paradise Lost, Milton constructed at least fifty-four. These similes not only are a pleasure to read and to analyze, but also they provide the poetic rungs which enable the poems to become loftier and loftier. Several of Milton's epic similes bear resemblances to Vergil's--a matter for later discussion.

Subtle but important evidence of the Aeneid's presence in and influence upon Paradise Lost appears throughout the poem. The logical progression, it seems, is to examine these passages as they occur following the succession of the books of the poems.

Before many lines into Book I, Milton, while describing Satan's ascent from the Lake of Fire, remembers Vergil's description of Mount Aetna during the flashback of Book III.¹³ Milton forms a simile about Aetna "whose combustible/And fuell'd entrails thence conceiving Fire,/Sublim'd with Mineral fury, aid the Winds,/And leave a singed bottom all

involv'd/With stench and smoke"(I.233-37). . . . Vergil's description of Mount Aetna is found in Book III: "it tears its own guts out and heaves/a vomit of boulders; up roll molten rocks/with groans and bubbles and seething, deep, deep down"(575-77).

An obvious, but effective and flattering parallel of a Miltonic simile to one of Vergil's appears seventy-two lines after the aforementioned simile. In Book VI of the Aeneid as Charon approaches the bank of Acheron, a ghastly horde of spirits rushes to Charon in an attempt to gain passage across the river. Vergil pictures them as being "as many as forest leaves that flutter down/at the first autumn frost" (11.309-10). Milton uses the same analogy, and again it occurs in Hell, as Satan summons from "that inflamed Sea" (I.300) his legions

. . . who lay intrans't
 Thick as autumnal Leaves that strow the Brooks
 In Vallombrosa, where th'Eturian shades
 High overarch't imbower
 . . .(11.301-04)

Just as the leaves are fallen from the trees and no longer serve the trees from which they fell, so are the spirits in Hades, and to an even greater extent, so are the fallen devils who no longer serve God.

Book II of the Aeneid begins with Aeneas speaking ab alto toro(11.2)--from a high couch, an elevated position

above his hosts. (Although the phrase, ab alto toro, does not appear in the translation which I used, nevertheless I believe that it merits mentioning.) Book II of Paradise Lost opens in a similar way: "High on a throne of Royal State . . ./Satan exalted sat . . ./and by success untaught/ His proud imaginations thus displayed"(11.1,5,9-10). Both characters are figuratively and literally above their audiences; both are preparing to make an important speech, and all this occurs in the opening lines of the second books of the poems.

The Latin verb, circumspicere--"to look around on all sides" makes an important contribution to the effect of particular scenes in at least three instances in Paradise Lost--Vergil uses the verb to the same effect during the flashback of Book II. Vergil first--here again, I must refer to the Latin: [Sinon] circumspexit oculis Phrygia agmina--(2.68) "Sinon looked round on the Trojan army." Prior to this line, Sinon had just approached the Trojan army and was armed with^alie contrived to obtain the Trojan's confidence so that he could get into Troy and release the Greeks from the horse. As he stood there assuming a sympathetic countenance, he slowly surveyed the crowd(circumpexit). The same idea occurs when Beelzebub is presenting his argument to the devils in Book II: "Here he had need/All circumspection, and wee now no less/Choice in our suffrage"(11.413-15); that is, whomever the devils select to send out of Hell must be able to look around on all sides, to examine everything. Later

in Book III as Satan enters the Universe, "Round he surveys,
and well might where he stood/So high above the circling
Canopy/Of Night's extended shade . . ." (ll.555-57)--once
again the idea of circumspicere is evident. During Book IV
after Satan watches Adam and Eve "imparadis't in one
another's arms" (l.506), Milton calls on circumspicere again:
"So saying, [Satan] his proud step he scornful turn'd,
But with sly circumspection, and began/Through wood, through
waste, o'er hill, o'er dale his roam" (ll.536-38). A
mental picture of both Sinon and Satan, looking out, slowly
turning with unsteady confidence, yet proud, can be visualized
easily.

For the last item in this series of verbal elements of
the Aeneid present in Paradise Lost, I have chose the
respective revelation of future days in the poems. "Adam's
vision of the future of mankind rests on epic precedent like
the vision of Rome's future that Aeneas sees in the Elysian
field . . ." ¹⁴ The revelation appears in the Aeneid in
Book VI, lines 752-892. Anchises, Aeneas, and the Sibyl
climb "up on a mound where they could see the files/approaching
and watch the faces as they passed" (ll.754-5). Anchises
begins to foretell Aeneas of his destiny:

Now you shall see the glory that awaits
the children of Troy and their Italian sons--
all souls of splendor, who shall bear our name.
Hear their story, and learn your destiny. (ll.756-9).

Adam receives his revelation, though it is somewhat less optimistic than the one in the Aeneid, from Michael in Book XI.357 through Book XII.551. Like Anchises, Aeneas, and the Sibyl, Michael and Adam also ascend a hill for the revelation. Michael begins with:

. . . know I am sent
 To show thee what shall come in future days
 To thee and to thy Offspring; good with bad
 Expect to hear, supernal Grace contending
 With sinfulness of Men. . . (l.356-60)

Aside from the structural, conventional, and incidental elements of the Aeneid and Paradise Lost remains a **thematic** consideration. Overriding both poems is the theme of religion with its conflict between duty and obedience.

"One of the results which both Augustus and Vergil hoped to see effected with the help of the Aeneid was a revival of faith in the old-time religion. The educated Romans of the day were becoming quite blasé and sophisticated and were gradually losing the faith of their fathers with its simple, unquestioning reliance on the infallible wisdom of the gods and their helpful interference in human affairs."¹⁵

The story of Aeneas, the son of a goddess, provided an excellent subject for Vergil's epic because it meant that Rome's origin was tied to the deities. Aeneas was destined to establish a new empire; and along the way, he was subjected to the inclementia deorum--the inclemency of the gods,

wandered physically and spiritually, struggled between duty and temptation, and finally accomplished his mission (though this actually happens after the end of the poem). The closest that Aeneas came to succumbing to temptation and neglecting his duty happened when he nearly decided to remain with Dido. Jove took deterministic action by sending Mercury to remind Aeneas of his duty; the Messenger asked: "Your throne, your state--are they forgotten?" (IV.267). Aeneas explains to Dido later that he cannot act of his own free will:

If fate hate let me govern my own life
and heal my troubles in the way I willed,
I would be living in Troy. . . .

But Apollo Grynean sent me to Italy. (IV.340-2,345)

Unlike Aeneas, Adam was totally in control of his will. In Book III of Paradise Lost, God proclaims that he gave free will to all "th'Ethereal Powers/And Spirits." (ll.100-1) Adam, who was made "just and Right,/Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall," (III.98-9) chose to fall by eating the Forbidden fruit ~~as did Eve. Eve~~ ^{as did Eve. Eve} It was determined that Aeneas could not fail, but Adam was at liberty to obey or to disobey the command not to eat the Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Milton, the champion of free-will and rebel disillusioned with the political systems in his country, made it clear that man's fall came owing to his own free accord.

Eager to uncover and to reveal elements of the Aeneid in Paradise Lost, I undertook this study. Both poems share much in addition to anything pointed out in this paper, such as brilliant authorship and composition which give the poems a probable permanent endurance. Studying the Aeneid and Paradise Lost has benefited me with an appreciable asset. Journeying through the poems, experiencing their grandeur, standing agape at their poetical perfection--through all this, a communion is established for me with the two poets, something which they surely must have hoped that their readers would discover.

NOTES

¹ Vergil, The Aeneid, trans. Frank O. Copley (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965). Hereafter, all quotations from the Aeneid are from this edition.

² John Milton, Paradise Lost, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1962). Hereafter, all quotations from Paradise Lost are from this edition.

³ The Poems of John Milton, ed. John Carey and Alastair Fowler (London: London Group Ltd. of W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1968), p.445.

⁴ (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1968), p. 67.

⁵ P. 67.

⁶ P. 67.

⁷ P. 67-8.

⁸ M. H. Abrams et al., eds., The Norton Anthology of English Literature, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1974), I, 1360.

⁹ P. 1360.

¹⁰ P. 1360.

¹¹ P. 1360.

¹² See note in Hughes, Bk. II.530.

¹³ See note in Hughes, Bk. I.231.

¹⁴ See note in Hughes, Bk. XI.357.

¹⁵ Vergil, Vergil's Aeneid, ed. Clyde Pharr (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath & Co., 1964), p. 6.

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