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VIRGIL'S EPIC TECHNIQUE

Richard Heinze

Translated by Hazel and David Harvey
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Preface by Antonie Wlosok

Second Edition with Index of Citations



PAPERBACKS

composed without regard to the other books, and so far as subject-matter and material are concerned, more or less finished and brought to completion]. Cf. also Wilamowitz, *Homer. Untersuchungen* (Berlin: 1884) 117 note; C. Schiller, *Quaestiones Vergilianae* (Diss. Greifswald, 1884) 15 etc.; Kroll op. cit. (p. 63 n. 102, p. 148), although I must say that I strongly disagree with both his interpretation of the facts and his views on their consequences.

34. Callimachus rejects the ἐν ἀεσμοῖα διηγητέες [a single continuous song] for himself, fr. 1.3 Pf.; see C. Dillthey, *De Callim. Cydippa* (Leipzig, 1863) 25. 'The frequently cited phrase μέγα βιβλίον μέγα κακόν [a great tome is a great evil] makes much better sense from the standpoint of the listener than from that of the librarian or the reader,' R. Reitzenstein, *Epigramm und Skolion* (Giessen, 1893) 2.

2

Invention

I. Mortals

a) Characters

1. Generic characteristics

Ancient literary theory distinguished very sharply between the characterization of types and the characterization of individuals. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle is most interested in the characterization of individuals, but he does occasionally allude to the characterization of types; he deals with the latter more fully in the *Rhetoric*. It is significant that Horace's *Ars Poetica* lays particular emphasis on this kind (112-18; 156-78), and passes very quickly over the other, in a way that shows that he believes that in elevated poetry a mere handful of conspicuous features will provide sufficient characterization of individuals (119-27). This corresponds exactly with the practice of the post-classical phases of ancient poetry. As early as Aristotle, we find the opinion that 'more recent' tragedy lacks ἦθος [moral character] (*Poetics* 1450b 25); it had been pushed into the background by πόθος [emotion]. In Hellenistic poetry, subtler touches of individual characterization are restricted almost entirely to comedy and the less elevated genres (where, it is true, with a few brilliant exceptions, it became fossilized into 'typical' characterization). Serious poetry was considered to have other aims; it employed characterization, if at all, only in broad outlines or in a general way. Callimachus' Acontius and Cydippe, as the recently discovered papyrus shows, were simply a boy and a girl, a neutrally-coloured ground from which the splendid blossoms of passionate love, with all their rich hues, can spring. Apollonius' Jason is a stereotyped heroic youth — in so far as a man of Apollonius' calibre is capable of conceiving one; his Medea is merely the typical maiden who is overpowered by the strength of Eros; the only way in which a woman like her could plausibly have become a *Medea ferox* [fierce Medea] would have been by means of more individual characterization. Theocritus' Amycus is the stupid, clumsy, foreign athlete, the opposite of the Hellenic Polydeuces, in whom mind and body are equally well developed.

Virgil's roots were in Hellenistic poetry; but he was too enthusiastic and perceptive a reader of Homer and Attic tragedy not to attempt, at least from time to time, to rise above the level of the Alexandrians.

The main aspects of characterization according to γένη [types] are, in the first place, the differences between the stages of human life, and between male and female; secondly, the differences that are characteristic of various nations and social

classes, though this last category is irrelevant to the heroic world of Virgil's epic.¹

We have already mentioned (p. 128) the young Ascanius in connection with the *Iulus Troiae* [Troy Game]. In the character of Ascanius, Virgil was depicting a typical young member of the nobility, noble by birth and noble by nature, although, since he is a heroic youth, he is mature enough to take part in the hunt and in battle at an earlier age than youths of today. In his case, he had had no mother to care for him during the long years of his childhood; he had been taken along on a dangerous voyage that had wandered here, there and everywhere. It is understandable that *ante annos animamque gerit curamque virilem* (9.311) [he bore beyond his years the mind and responsibilities of a man]. But Virgil has nevertheless – and this is a delicate touch – made use of the fact that Ascanius is no more than a child, by attributing to him the exclamation *heus etiam mensas consumimus* [Hullo, we are even munching our tables!] on the occasion of the *prodigium* of the tables (7.116), a piece of schoolboy humour (*nec plura adludens* [jokingly; that was all he said]) which Aeneas is immediately able to recognize as a fortuitous omen.² Furthermore, I observe that Ascanius' first action in battle, the bow-shot with which he kills Numanus (9.590ff.), is also the last action of his that we hear of; it is as if he grows before our very eyes from childhood to young adulthood.

Next to Ascanius in years comes Euryalus;³ he is already old enough to take part in the young men's foot-race – although childish tears roll down his cheeks when he realizes that he is not going to win the prize (5.343); and he is already old enough to take part in the dangers of battle – but he does not yet possess the caution and experience of a mature warrior; and it is this that leads to his death. Then come the young heroes Lausus and Pallas, as brave as Euryalus, except that Euryalus' bravery is characterized as mere hunger for action and honour, whereas that of Pallas is characterized as resolute and steadfast courage,⁴ and that of Lausus, which is shown in one scene only, the scene in which he meets his death, as self-sacrifice through *pietas*; but the difference here lies in the situation rather than the characterization; these three young men – and Nisus may be added as a fourth – are presented on the whole as ideal types of youthful manliness, full of hope; so that it is fitting that, for the sake of a great cause, they should throw themselves into dangers for which, in the eyes of their more cautious elders, they are still too young.⁵

The mature men, Turnus, Aeneas, Mezentius, are not given the typical attributes of men of their age; more particular traits are mentioned.⁶

Typical old men include Ilioneus, Nautes (5.704), Evander and, above all, Anchises; they speak and act calmly, thoughtfully, dispassionately; they give guidance to the younger men and offer advice from the rich store of their experience, and they enjoy talking about the past.⁷ Some of them have been granted the privilege of special insight into the will of the gods and the decrees of fate: Nautes has been given this power by Pallas Athene (5.704); Anchises interprets the omen when the Trojans first land in Italy (3.539); he appears as prophet at 7.123, a fragment that survives from an earlier draft. The portrayal of Latinus is also rich in generic characteristics; but Virgil adds individual touches as well.

As for the women, their generic characteristic is, above all, that they are more easily excited; in their case, every emotion is much more likely to develop into passion, and this passion destroys their psychological balance and drives them mad

– the Trojan women in Book 5, Dido, Amata represent the various stages of madness; and as soon as one woman is seized by madness of this kind, it spreads like an infection (7.392); sorrow becomes despair, and despair brings death, or turns life into a cruel torment (e.g. Euryalus' mother 9.473ff.; Juturna at 12.879). All these were traits which Hellenistic poets were particularly fond of stressing when they portrayed the nature of women, but they were very common in Roman thought too.⁸ *Varium et mutabile semper femina* [women were ever things of many changing moods], Mercury tells Aeneas in a dream (4.569); the Trojan women set fire to the ships in their despair and fury, but as soon as they have caught sight of the men *piger incepti lucisque* (5.678) [they were disgusted at what they had done and ashamed to be seen in the light of day]; the women of Laurentum ally themselves with Amata (7.392ff.) to avenge the violation of her rights as a mother, and embrace the cause of Turnus, and in so doing they are largely responsible for the outbreak of war; but after the first defeat they curse the cruel war and Turnus' marriage-plans: let him fight by himself, man against man, to win the kingdom that he claims (11.215). Yet Amata remains a loyal supporter of Turnus; in taking his side she is setting her own life at risk. Her behaviour is not motivated by anything special in her character, but – as Virgil portrays it – it is typical of the way that any woman in her position would react, except of course that not every woman is driven to extremes by an Allecto.⁹ She has selected Turnus, that handsome, noble, splendid young hero, who is more over one of her kin, to be her son-in-law; when things turn out differently and her daughter is to be handed over to a homeless, penniless foreigner, she resists extremely violently, as might be expected; she is an easy prey for Allecto. First she pours out her grievances and entreaties to the king, accuses the stranger of being a 'treacherous pirate', and uses bold subterfuges in an attempt to turn the oracle of Faunus to her own advantage; and all this is *solito matrum de more* (7.357) [as a mother well might speak]. When Latinus remains unmoved she becomes a raging Bacchant; and disaster ensues.

Camilla, the maiden on horseback, belongs to a world outside the normal sphere of women and is not to be measured by the same yardstick as the others. But in order to make her perhaps not totally implausible, Virgil has given her one typical feminine characteristic: the gleaming accoutrements of the Phrygian priest catch her eye, *femine o praedae et spoliolum amore* (11.782) [in a woman's hot passion for plundering and spoils], she throws all caution to the winds in her pursuit, and falls victim to her own passionate greed.

All these rather unpleasant characteristics are offset by only one praiseworthy quality: a woman's unwavering love for her own family. This is of course an emotion that is also felt by honourable men, but whereas in their case it is regarded as the fulfilment of a duty and acknowledged as such, it is thought to be just a woman's nature, and therefore not to deserve any special praise; for a man it is one obligation among many, for a woman it is her whole existence.¹⁰ A woman's love for her family can take various forms. Love for her children: Venus is the prime example, tireless in her concern for Aeneas, as Thetis is for Achilles in the *Iliad*, but more passionate and more tender; Euryalus' mother too, who forgets all troubles and cares in working for her son, and who, when she loses him, no longer has anything to live for; Andromache who loves in Ascanius the resemblance to her own

Asyanax (3.486) and hopes that Ascanius yearns for his lost mother (341), because she feels that if the same fate had befallen her, she would have survived in the memory of her Asyanax; Creusa, whose last words to her husband are *nati serva communis amorem* (2.789) [guard the love of the son whom we share]. Love between brothers and sisters: Anna, Dido's *unicam soror* (4.8) [the sister whose heart was one with hers], whose first thought when she hears of the death of the sister 'whom I love more than life itself' (4.31) is regret that Dido had not thought her worthy to share her fate; Iuturna, whose immortality becomes a torture to her when her brother dies. Love between husband and wife: Dido, whose greatest pride lay in her fidelity to her dead husband, becomes unfaithful when she is fatally infatuated with Aeneas; she hears the voice of the dead Sychaeus calling her, and resolves to die, so as to rejoin the husband of her youth in the underworld, and to be united in love with him again, as in days gone by; and, again, Andromache, *coniunx Hectoris*¹¹ [the wife of Hector] even when forced to be wife to another (3.488), who utters the incomparable *Hector ubi est?* ['Where is Hector?'] when she thinks that she sees the shade of Aeneas (312). Finally, when their ancestral home, their fathers, husbands and brothers are in extreme danger, then heroic courage wells up in the hearts of the women also, and *verus amor patriae* (11.475, 891) [true love of their homeland] drives them on to the walls to meet the enemy attack.

In characterizing whole nations, Virgil most often restricts himself to a handful of outstanding traits which were common currency to his contemporaries and himself.¹² Sinon is the very type of the deceitful, resourceful, wily Greek.¹³ Venus fears danger for Aeneas from the *Tyrii bilingues* (1.661) [deceitful Tyrians]: that is the conventional Roman view of the Carthaginians, although it is hardly borne out by the behaviour of Dido and her people. Again, the Etruscans are described by their own king Tarchon just as the Romans usually imagined them: bent on pleasure, dancing and feasting at lavish sacrifices, *hic amor, hoc studium* (11.739) [this is their passion, their interest]; this may be historically justified to some extent, but there is nothing about Virgil's Etruscans that seems to justify these criticisms; perhaps the point of this depiction is to offer an explanation of the maiden Camilla's military successes as being due to the inefficiency of her enemy, which consisted mostly of Etruscans? Another traditional attribute, the terrible cruelty of Etruscan pirates, is used to characterize Mezentius 8.485 (see above p. 168). The native inhabitants of Italy are characterized by Numanus, himself an Italian, as being like the popular image of the ancient Sabines and so forth (8.603); Numanus also, surprisingly, characterizes the Trojans as Phrygians, worshippers of Cybele, for this has also been best known to the Romans (9.614ff.), and the Numidian Iarbas has also imagined Aeneas in this way (4.215); of course this description is totally inapplicable to Virgil's Trojans. All Ligurians are liars:¹⁴ Camilla too has this in mind when she shouts to the Ligurian opponent who has tried a cowardly trick on her: *nequiquam patrias temptasti lubricus artus nec fraus te incolentem fallaci perferet Auno* (11.716) ['You were slippery! But it has done you no good to try your native tricks, for your cunning will never bring you safe home to Aunus your father, who is a cheat like yourself!']

2. Aeneas

Thus in the case of the Greeks and the Ligurians, Virgil took a single character and portrayed him as typical of his countrymen. In the case of Aeneas, he did essentially the same, although with much richer detail, representing him as the typical Roman as conceived by the Romans themselves – or, more precisely, by the Romans of the Augustan age and of the Stoic persuasion. This type is well-known in its main outlines; and to portray him in full detail and to make him comprehensible as a product of the outlook of the Augustan age would be an important and attractive undertaking, but would be appropriate to a history of Roman morality, not to an account of Virgil's artistic technique. Furthermore, it is impossible to see the significance of this typical Roman in the context of the work as a whole until we come to consider Virgil's treatment of the supernatural (below, 239f.), since the most essential aspect of Aeneas' character lies in his relationship to destiny and the gods. At this point we must concern ourselves with a different but equally important question. It is clear that the character of Aeneas varies considerably from one part of the poem to another. He has so often been held up as an example of the ideal Roman whom the younger generation should try to emulate; and so, precisely because he is such a paragon, he has become an abstract concept without flesh and blood. I must confess that he does not strike me as much of a paragon in the first half of the poem,¹⁵ and I believe that Virgil would have agreed with me. Certainly, the Aeneas who rescues the Penates, his father, and his son, who shows in the night battle in Book 2 that he does not fear death, may be regarded as courageous and devoted to his family; but that is not everything. A man who has so little presence of mind when danger breaks out that he rushes blindly into the fighting, driven by *furore* [frenzy] and *ira* [anger] (2.316), without stopping to make sure that his family is safe; who is so utterly thoughtless during the flight that he even fails to notice that his wife is no longer with him until all the others are gathered at the meeting-place; who – let us not forget his encounter with Venus in Book 1 – breaks out in loud lamentation about his sad lot, and does not have the courage to trust the comforting assurances of his divine mother until he is convinced by the evidence of his own eyes; who allows himself to become so ensnared by the delights of love that he quite forgets his high destiny, and has to be reminded of it by the stern rebukes of Jupiter; who, finally, allows himself to become so discouraged by the burning of the ships in Sicily that, even though Jupiter has obviously answered his prayer, his thoughts revert to the idea of staying there with his good friend Acestes in peace and quiet, *fatorum oblitus* [forgetful of his destiny], and he has to be reminded yet again by the aged Nautes (5.700ff.) where his supreme duty lies; is a man like that, we ask ourselves, really an ideal Roman, a shining example for the younger generation? Did Virgil really have no understanding of what a hero is made of? And did he really believe that the image of his hero would remain untarnished if he kept breaking the commandment which, as he himself consciously acknowledged, ought to have overridden all others – the command to follow the will of the gods with steadfast devotion? It is true that each time Aeneas is over-hasty, or displays weakness, Virgil carefully motivates it from the situation; but a different character would have reacted differently to such situations. And if Virgil was unaware of how seriously his

hero fell short of the ideal which Virgil himself had outlined, then how is it that his hero approaches more and more closely to this ideal as the story unfolds, so that by the last books hero and ideal are one and the same? We might imagine that this results from the development of the story, and to some extent this may be true; but the development of the story is insufficient to explain why, for example, Aeneas' reactions to the injustice of Fate in Book 5 are so very different from his reactions in Book 12. I cannot persuade myself that one of the greatest artistic ideas of the work crept into it by mere chance, without Virgil's knowledge or intention; I regard the change in the hero as Virgil's deliberate and considered design. In that case, we should not regard Aeneas as an ideal hero, perfect from the very beginning, but as a man who learns how to become a hero in the school of fate.¹⁶

During the sack of Troy, Aeneas displays the best side of his character, as far as patriotism, devotion and courage are concerned; but not, as we have just seen, from the point of view of judgement and presence of mind; he himself often says that he has lost his wits when he most needed them; Venus had to restrain him from a desperate course which would have brought about his own death and with it the destruction of his people. During the flight, it is Anchises who takes command and gives the directions which Aeneas is happy to obey, subordinating himself to the will of his father, which in turn is subject to the will of the gods. We cannot help feeling that the episode at Carthage would never have occurred had Anchises still been alive. After Anchises' death Aeneas is the leader of the refugees; after this severe blow, which happens so suddenly, he is fully aware of his obligations, and cares for his people; not only does he look after their physical welfare, but he also consoles them and keeps up their morale. He commends them, just as Anchises would have done, to the will and command of fate (1.205); God will bring their suffering to an end. But — and this touch is very characteristic indeed of Virgil — in the depths of his own heart he does not possess this faith in the gods which he is trying to instil into his people: *curis ingentibus aeger spe m vultu simulat* (208) [he concealed his sorrow deep within him and his face looked confident and cheerful]. This becomes quite clear in the conversation with Venus that follows: instead of trusting in fate and in divine protection, he complains that he, *pius Aeneas* [Aeneas the true], who has never failed to obey the commands laid upon him by fate, has now been cast into this miserable situation — *nec plura querentem passa Venus* (385) [but Venus would not listen to more complaints from him]. He hardly takes any notice of the comfort which she offers him — his faith is really not very strong; it is not until he sees the pictures on the temple, with their air of compassion, that 'his fears are allayed, and he dares to hope for life and to feel some confidence in spite of his distress' (45). Dido receives him; love ensnares him; he is in extreme danger of 'lying back' *fatisque datus non respicit urbis* [and taking no thought for those other cities which are his by destiny], when Jupiter's command abruptly rouses him from his life of ease and recalls him to his duty (460ff.); *heu regni rerumque oblite tuarum* (4.267) [For shame! you forget your destiny and that other kingdom which is to be yours!] exclaims Mercury, rebuking him; and this time, on Jupiter's orders, he appeals, not to Aeneas' desire to achieve fame and glory, but to his duty as a father to Ascanius — his speech could hardly be more severe. But at least his rebuke has results: Aeneas suppresses his personal feelings and his heart's

desire, remains deaf to all entreaties and lamentations, and guiltily abandons the woman he loves, driving her to her death by his faithlessness.¹⁷ We might expect that by now it would be impossible for Aeneas to neglect the fulfilment of the task for which he has made such a great sacrifice; but he has still not achieved the unwavering trust in fate and the gods that befits a man chosen by the gods. The prayer in which he appeals to Jupiter when his ships are on fire does not display an unwavering faith (5.691); and even though Jupiter responds to it, Aeneas gives way to faint-hearted doubt: the aged Nautes has to assume Anchises' role and offer him advice and — this is another characteristic touch — in doing so, he uses exactly the same words of comfort and encouragement as those that Aeneas had previously used to address his companions: *quo fata irahunt retrahuntque sequamur; quidaquid erit, superanda omnis fortuna ferendo est* (709) [we should accept the lead which destiny offers us, whether to go forward or no, and choose our way accordingly. Whatever is to befall, it is always our own power of endurance which must give us control over our future]. This advice makes a deep impression on Aeneas (*incensus dictis senioris amici* [719] [the advice from his older friend set his thoughts on fire]), though it fails to give him total confidence; he only achieves that after Anchises' ghost has appeared, and after the events that follow: the poet wished to mark a turning point in this scene:¹⁸ indeed, a turning point in Aeneas' destiny: Anchises proclaims to his son that Jupiter *caelo tandem miseratus ab alto est* [from high heaven has had compassion on you at last] and *tandem* [at last], which refers back to the vocative *nate Iliacis exercite fais* [son, disciplined by the heavy burden of Troy's destiny] shows that this does not merely apply to the extinguishing of the fire aboard the ships but must refer to his destiny as a whole. Anchises then endorses Nautes' advice, and adds that Aeneas is to seek him out in the Underworld: *tum genus ornum tuum et quae dentur moenia discas* [you shall learn then all your future descendants and what manner of walled city is granted to you]. This has an immediate effect on Aeneas: all at once he appears confident and assured: *extemplo socios primumque arcessit Acceten et Iovis imperium et cari praecepta parentis edocet et quae nunc animo sententia constet* [then, immediately, he summoned his comrades, Accetes first. He expounded to them Jupiter's command, his dear father's instructions, and the decision which he had reached in his own mind]. However, what shows more than anything else that Aeneas has undergone a spiritual transformation and gained a new strength of character, is his speech after the prophecy of the Sibyl. She has prophesied that he must endure still greater sufferings than those that he has already undergone, but instead of complaining and fainting he says with pride *non ulla laborum, o virgo, nova mi facies inopinave surgit; omnia praecepti atque animo mecum ante peregi* (6.103) [Maid, no aspect of tribulation which is new to me or unforeseen can rise before me, for I have traced my way through all that may happen in the anticipation of my inward thought']. The Stoic Seneca thought that this summed up the attitude of the wise man when threatened by the onslaughts of fate (*Epist.* 76.33).¹⁹ The procession of heroes in Book 6, however, is intended to strengthen this mood — indeed, this is its main function in the general scheme of the work as a whole: Anchises says that he has long desired to show his son the future of his family, *quo magis Italia mecum laetere reperita* (718) [that you might rejoice with me the more in having found Italy]; he wants to tell him of the fame of his

descendants (757), and when he has reached Augustus, the most famous of them all, he utters the words which can only be understood in terms of what we may call the proreptic purpose of the whole passage, and which at the same time, when rightly understood, pay a more profound homage to Augustus than could be conveyed by any other method of praise (806):

*et d u b i t a m u s adhuc virtutem extendere facis,
aut metus Ausonia prohibet consistere terra?*

[can we now hesitate to assert our valour by our deeds? Can any fear now prevent us from taking our stand on Italy's soil?]

In the dangers that follow, Aeneas must show that he can convert his newly-won confidence into action. This does not mean that he recklessly rushes towards his goal, cheerfully trusting in the gods to preserve him from every danger; Virgil holds back his climax until the very end. When threatened by war, we see Aeneas, not plunged into doubt and despair, but worried and thoughtful,²⁰ as befits a leader, and when the embassy to Evander has not achieved the result that Aeneas had hoped for, and a new uncertainty has arisen, Aeneas sinks again into deep thought. But there are great differences between this scene and similar situations earlier in the poem: first, Aeneas no longer needs any human advice and encouragement (as he had done from Nautes in Book 5), and secondly, he accepts with joy and absolute confidence both the message that he receives from Tiberinus in a dream, and the sign that Venus gives him in the heavens. We have only to compare his words at 8.532ff. with his reaction to the appearance of Venus in human form in Book 1. The words with which he introduces himself to Evander (8.131) are also full of his newly-found confidence: *mea me virtus et sancta oracula divum...coniuuxere tibi et factis egero volentem* [my own valour and holy oracles from gods,...have joined me to you and brought me here in willing obedience to my destiny].

It is clear that he has now reached the point where he is being led by his fate instead of being dragged along by it. But it is not until the battle itself that the hero shows that he has achieved a height of heroism from which he will not descend again. In the story, this is shown by the way that divine intervention and support retreat into the background: Jupiter knows that he can leave Aeneas to his own resources, to his *animus ferax patiensque pericli* (10.610) [his own proud spirit, dauntless in peril]. In his new mood he can still feel deep sorrow at the death of Pallas, but this does not deflect him from his duty for one moment (11.96); he goes forth to his duel with Turnus, which he believes he has succeeded in arranging at last, with total confidence in the fates, and instils the same confidence into his men (12.110); and when the agreement is broken through treachery and he himself is wounded and has to keep away from the battle-field, and the enemy has gained the upper hand, he does not waver for a moment: he gives orders that the arrow is to be cut out of his wound with a sword, so that he may return to the fight (389). As he does so, he says farewell to Ascanius, in words which display an unsullied peacefulness of spirit, such as befits the wise man: he renounces the favours of fortune, he is conscious of his own worth, and he has no doubt whatever that he will succeed in the end; hence he can present himself as an *exemplum* to his son.²¹

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If we ask what gave Virgil the idea of portraying the development of a character in this way, it will not be of much use to look among the poets for precedents. Not that development of character was totally unknown in ancient poetry; what other term can one use to describe the mental processes which the heroines and the audience experience in Euripides' *Medea* and *Hecuba*, to say nothing of the greater changes in character found in comedy (and perhaps their Roman adapters are guilty of making them even greater)?²² But in drama we are presented with the development of individual characters, and in the case of tragedy it is quite clear that the poet's problem was to make a specific and exceptional deed credible. Virgil's problem is different. He did not envisage his task as one of analysing a particular psychological case, and his aim was not to characterize Aeneas as an individual by describing every slight deviation from the straight and narrow, so as to differentiate him from other heroic figures in myth; for it cannot possibly have been part of his plan to depict the man chosen by Providence to achieve great things as a fundamentally despondent and weak character. Rather, just as Aeneas the fully developed hero is a model of the Stoic 'wise man', so Aeneas the developing hero is a perfect example of what the Stoics termed the (*ἡρωικὸν ἄνθρωπον*), the man who makes progress in wisdom and virtue.²³ Even the man chosen by the gods does not attain the highest level of morality in a single stride. Total control of the emotions, and the ability to remain as steadfast as a rock before the capricious onslaughts of fortune, is something that is achieved as the result of a grim struggle, a struggle in which a man will of course sometimes relapse into his former condition of weakness and 'foolishness', and one which none may win without the help of the gods.²⁴ The philosophical doctrines concerning the divinity of the world and of the human soul, and concerning the true goal (*τέλος*) of life and the means of achieving it, had prepared the ground for a moral regeneration; the clear, unshakeable insight into the nature of things which is revealed to Aeneas in the Underworld is the result of these doctrines. This insight is something that must be preserved throughout all the troubles of life: that is why even Aeneas does not have his crown offered to him on a plate by Fortune, but has to prove himself worthy of it by winning it from his enemies in a fair and square battle.²⁵

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That Virgil has taken the risk of using his portrait of Aeneas to embody the typical fate of a human soul as it struggles towards its goal – just as his portrayal of Jupiter embodies the rule of divine providence as taught by the Stoics – is certainly a matter of great importance; but it must be clear by now that we cannot speak of individual personal characterization in this context. And what is true of Aeneas is just as true of the other characters in the work. Not a single person is depicted with a unique set of characteristics as a man who once walked on this earth, once and once only; nor is any of them drawn from real life. On the contrary, Virgil depicts character by starting from an ideal, and one person is distinguished from another by the degree to which he has progressed towards this ideal; he is characterized not by the qualities which he possesses, but by those which he lacks.

3. Individuals and the Ideal

We have already discussed Dido as the ideal of the heroic queen: she would have attained perfection if she had not succumbed in the face of an irresistible temptation. Camilla represents the ideal of the warrior-maiden: there is only one respect in which she pays the price for her femininity, and it leads to her death. Latinus represents the ideal king: pious, considerate, generous, just and mild of heart; he lacks only one quality, *constantia* [steadfastness]. He is an old man who has reigned for many years peacefully over a peaceful nation; he is already nearing the grave when he is thrust suddenly into a situation where he has to uphold what he perceives to be right against the onslaught of all his entourage, all his family, and all his subjects – and that is when his strength deserts him. Priam is the exact opposite: he has a lifetime of warfare behind him, he remains a warrior right up to the very last moment, and when his son is killed before his eyes, he forgets that he is weak and old, and feebly flings his spear at the enemy. Then there is Turnus, the ideal of strong, decisive manhood in every respect – except, as we have seen above,²⁶ that he is *consili expers*, lacking in commonsense and moderation. Mezentius, endowed with all the qualities that befit the splendour of a hero, falls short of the ideal only in that he shows neither respect for the gods, nor that *humanitas* [sense of humanity] which is so closely associated with it; this alienates him from his people and drives him into battle, where he is killed. In his case, Virgil adds an unexpected touch, the love that he shows for his son, which results in a conflict within his character that would do credit to Victor Hugo. In the boat-race, Cloanthus is the ideal captain; as for the other contestants, Gyas loses because of his obstinacy, Sergestus because of his frantic impetuosity, and Memmius is overtaken at the last moment because he has failed to secure the support of the gods.

This is sufficient to show the technique that Virgil used to construct his characters. It is clear that this technique will result in a preponderance of generalized figures, and an absence of individual traits; and this is a weakness in Virgil's characterization. The majority of critics, certainly, are distressed not to find any sharply-defined individuals, and have therefore failed to do justice to those aspects of Virgil's characterization that are comparatively successful. Such aspects certainly exist; I hope that my earlier discussion of Turnus, for example, has made it clear that he is a good deal more than a schematized conventional hero; Virgil maintains this simple basic character, with appropriate nuances, in a wide variety of situations, and does so in a lively and consistent manner; and his character is put in a clearer light, with a well-calculated development and many finely observed details, by means of effective contrasts. All these touches are introduced very subtly and could easily be missed by a hasty reader. We should also credit the poet with another merit: he never overdoes things, and never stoops to cheap effects. His intentions would have been clearer if he had described people's characters directly, but he hardly ever does, except when the plot requires it, as in the case of Evander's account of Mezentius; only in the case of a minor figure such as Drances does the poet himself explain the motivation of an action, when it cannot be deduced from the action itself (11.336). Furthermore, he certainly makes no attempt to avoid stock characterizing epithets – *pius Aeneas*, *Mezentius contemptor divum*, *Messapus equum domitor*

[Aeneas the true, Mezentius scornor of the gods, Messapus tamer of horses] being content to follow traditional epic practice; but he does not merely fob us off with these epithets; on the contrary, he is careful to illustrate them in the action.

b) The action

Superficially, the events in the *Aeneid* resemble those in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. A closer examination will reveal that Virgil handles the narration very differently. Virgil lays much more emphasis than Homer on emotions rather than events, the psychological rather than the physical.

It is true that the *Odyssey* is more interested in what goes on in the mind of the characters than the *Iliad* is; but it gives almost equal prominence and significance to physical events – bodily pleasure and pain, and bodily suffering and deeds. We enter into the feelings of the companions of Odysseus as they sit day and night at the oars, desperately struggling against weariness and exhaustion, or when they see starvation staring them in the face; we share with Odysseus the sensation of swimming in the open sea, making a superhuman effort to reach the shore, only to be hurled against the rocks by the breakers, and to fall back into the sea with hands lacerated and bleeding. Odysseus, ἀπόρροπος ἦν ψυχῆν [struggling to preserve his life] (*Od.* 1.5) as he makes his way home to Ithaca, is presented so clearly that we feel we could almost reach out and touch him: how frequently he escapes some pitiable death by the skin of his teeth! He draws the bow with only the slightest effort, though none of the suitors is able to do so; and then he has to fight against them and overcome them in a bloody struggle. But physical pleasures have their place too: we are made to understand what a meal means to a man when he is starving, and a cloak when he is frozen, and a bath when his skin has been eaten away by salt foam. This effect is even stronger in the *Iliad*: the poet shows us in the most powerful way not only the pain of a wound, but also the enormous physical effort that is required to fight in heavy armour, and with a heavy shield, for hours on end. In the *Aeneid* none of these things gets more than a passing allusion.²⁷ Only once in the course of the voyage – during the sea-storm in Book 1 – are Aeneas and his men represented as being in deadly danger, and their escape is not due to their own efforts. The Harry threatens *dira fames* [terrible hunger]; when it actually occurs in Book 7 it sounds as if it is little more than a slight hitch in the catering, which means that the Trojans have to be content with a vegetarian diet. We can hardly imagine a naked, hungry Aeneas who collapses into deep, death-like sleep after terrifying exertions. What Aeneas suffers is emotional pain: the loss of his homeland and of his wife, his fruitless quest for his new kingdom, his separation from the woman he loves, the death of his faithful companions and so forth. The same is true of all those who take part in the battles: the worst thing is not the physical rigour of the fight, nor the pain of the wounds; Mezentius suffers more deeply from the loss of his son than from his wound; Nisus has to endure the sight of Euryalus slain before his very eyes; Turnus is ready to kill himself for shame and despair when Juno lures him away from the battlefield.

We can thus understand why Virgil emphasizes the psychological processes in