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**Vergil's Good Causes? Aetiology in Vergil's *Aeneid***

Scholarship has focused on aetiology in the *Aeneid* as a device of closure, which gives a sense of teleological resolution to open-ended human history. "Whenever Virgil introduces aetiology it is to link present and past, to convey both the antiquity of a tradition (so that the 'novelty' of its supposed introduction will strike the Augustan reader with precisely the opposite force) and its continuity" (Gransden). I argue that aetiology in the *Aeneid* frequently subverts any sense of continuity, closure, or resolution.

The *Lusus Troiae* is an often-cited example of the affirmative function of aetiology, for Vergil's explanation of the origin of the games emphasizes the continuity of both generations and tradition. But a re-reading of this *aition* in conjunction with the narrative of another Alban custom, the Gates of War, reveals how Vergil tropes aetiology as a device of resolution. Origin stories may operate as an expression of cultural continuity, mutually binding past, present, and future, as in the *Lusus Troiae*, but the Gates of War reveal that the antiquity and continuity of tradition are not always affirming. In fact, the Gates of War ekphrasis is an inverted *aition*; breaking with all tradition, Vergil asserts their continual presence, and the continuity of war, on Italian soil.

Aetiology refers to the familiar and actual; origin stories both presume and reassert a robust link between the text and the material world. In fact, Vergilian aetiology frequently disrupts the link between the textual and extratextual. The catalog of Italian heroes in *Aeneid* 7 is a case in point, for it seems a perfect vehicle for patriotic content. To the contrary, Vergil toys with his readers' expectations, presenting not a recognizable heroic old Italy, but a strange and alien place. In contrast to previous epic catalogs, the list of Italian heroes refutes all geographic order; rather, the heroes between Lausus and Camilla march in alphabetical order. The alphabetized catalog closes with the hero Virbius, whose aetiological narrative alludes directly to the story of Herobios narrated in the Italian portion of Callimachus' *Aetia*. At those junctures when Vergil's subject matter seems to have the clearest links to external, material reality, he is most Hellenistic, linking his narrative to Greek texts rather than Italian realities.

An aetiological focus re-frames the old debate over the lack of closure in the poem's ending. The foundation story promised in the proem (1.5-7) is never delivered; the anticipated foundation of Lavinium, Alba Longa, and Rome is subsumed by Turnus' death at the close. As Aeneas slays Turnus, the verb *condere* ironically echoes the epic proem: rather than founding a city (*conderet urbem*, 1.5) as expected and promised, Aeneas buries his sword in his enemy's side (*ferrum condit*, 12.950) (James, *AJP* 116 [1995] 623-37). Turnus' death acts as the final grim *aition*.