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Emotional Pain and the Framework of Virgil's *Aeneid*

This paper argues that unresolved emotional pain is the intellectual as well as artistic framework of the *Aeneid*, and that it persists as a shaping force of human reality as articulated by the poem. In elaborating this claim, I point in particular to memory as the site where the destructive potency of emotional pain is kept intact, and to the corresponding inadequacy of discourse and reason to change the patterns of human obsession in the epic.

The model I propose tries to move beyond a descriptive attempt to identify distinct authorial voices in the work, an approach associated, most notably, with A. Parry ('Two Voices,' *Arion* [1963]), and, more recently, with R.O.A.M. Lyne (*Further Voices* [1987]), to a more systematic and comprehensive account of Virgil's thought on human reality. Like Parry, I privilege human suffering as a key to understanding the poem; unlike Lyne and, especially, W.R. Johnson (*Darkness Visible* [1976]), I am not satisfied by appeals to the ambiguity, irony, or open-ended darkness of the poet's vision. The most insightful explications of this vision, in my view, have been M.C.J. Putnam's (*Poetry* [1965]; *Virgil's Aeneid* [1995]), who similarly stresses the crucial role of irrational passions and of memory; but rather than delineate cycles of violence and revenge, my aim has been to integrate the workings of indelible pain in the poem into a lucid view of the reality of the human psyche as Virgil may have imagined it.

I begin by a semantic and formal analysis of the proem of the *Aeneid* (1.1-11; a one-page handout will accompany the paper) vis--vis the exordia to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and trace the equivalence between Juno's unforgettable anger and Achilles' wrath, identifying the irresolubility of emotional pain as the source of the poet's utterance, as well as the thematic core of the poem. In order to validate this interpretation, I discuss Juno's subsequent speech (1.34-52a) in light of the final section of Book 12 (791ff.), where the resolution of her anger is immediately displaced by Iturna's eternal mourning for her brother's imminent death, and Aeneas' unrelieved memory of Pallas', both which determine Turnus' fate, and end the poem with the same indelibility of pain in which its initial speech act originated. I go on to examine the careful correlation between the textual setting of Juno's speech, the first in the *Aeneid*, and that of its last, spoken by Aeneas to the suppliant Turnus (12.945-52), and review the larger correspondence between the opening and ending of the poem, to argue that it is designed to frame the poem, thematically and artistically, by the ungovernable memory of emotional pain, whether its subject is divine or human.

I then look more closely at the swift reversal of Juno's mind in view of the fact that by this late point in the epic, it has become evident that the interactions of discourse are entirely inadequate to resolve emotional pain and efface it from memory. On the contrary, discourse, when not powerless, has served only to rekindle and increase pain. Looking in particular at the manipulation of discourse earlier in Book 12, namely at Juno's exhortation to Iturna, the language Aeneas and Latinus use to seal a void treaty between the Trojans and Italians, and the exchange between Turnus and Latinus which

opens the book, I show how the poet underscores the futility, and real harm, of trying to cure emotional pain by discourse.

From the preceding discussion I conclude that Juno's emotional reversal is, at best, unique to her, a psychological *deus ex machina*; more importantly, that no such resolution is imaginable in the world of human emotion. Finally, I note that the particular inadequacy of discourse and its reasoning to change the texture of human reality in the *Aeneid* not only implies the failure of philosophy's precepts, as well as of ideology and rhetoric, but also seriously impairs the possibilities of poetry itself, as an artifice of language, to heal emotional suffering, the very suffering which the *Aeneid* envisions so powerfully.