

Cosmology and the Structure of Vergil's *Aeneid*

The *Aeneid* contains numerous allusions to a cosmological cycle of creation, destruction, and renewal. Indeed, the overall structure of the epic consists of the destruction of the old Trojan world, and the creation of a new Roman world order, or the overcoming of chaotic forces that threaten to prevent it. Hardie (1986) has shown that subtle references to Gigantomachy, elemental order and chaos, and cosmogony elevate the narrative to a cosmic level, and connect various characters and events to mythological episodes. However, these connections exist at a frequency hitherto unexplored in the first half of the epic, and take on greater meaning when the basic cosmological nature of the poem's structure is understood. Minadeo (1969), Fowler (1997), and Farrell (2007) have analyzed the cycle from birth to death in the structure of the *De Rerum Natura*, but scholars are yet to demonstrate the *Aeneid*'s profound utilization of this Lucretian structure, where the initial hymn to life-bringing Venus is now the destructive wrath of Juno, and the dissolution of the Athenian plague becomes the end of destructive forces.

This paper will explore the *Aeneid*'s cosmological architecture and how the allusions to mythological creation, Gigantomachy, and world renewal act as structural stays bringing unity and cohesion specifically to the narrative layers in Books 2-4. In both the destruction of Troy and fall of Dido, imagery of elements breaking their natural bounds and returning to chaos predominates, and often multiple elements or world zones collide within the narrative. Flames of the same sort which consume Troy and are compared to a flooding river (*Aen.* 2.497 ff.) are renewed both in the fire of Dido's love for Aeneas and of her pyre, as well as in the simile of a flood of fire in the city (*Aen.* 4.297 ff.). Additionally, Brown (1990) and others have shown that the scene of Iopas' cosmogonic song (*Aen.* 1.740-6) prepares for both Dido and Troy's

destruction, but it also connects mythological creation to that of Carthage and the new Troy, as well as points forward to the upcoming cosmic allusions.

The Gigantomachic Typhonomachy is seen in the Typhoeus-like snakes which consume Laocoon and help to bring about Troy's fall. These are symbolically overcome as Aeneas takes on the imagery of the snake in his encounter with Androgeos (*Aen.* 2.377 ff.). Rauk (1991) sees the moral ambivalence of the Trojans in their appropriation of the snake imagery, and indeed the meaning of the Gigantomachy here is anything but straightforward. Aeneas in Carthage connects himself to the serpent by his very relating of this encounter to Dido just before he becomes the chaos-serpent in her destruction, yet the queen herself is also depicted as a chaotic force threatening to prevent Aeneas from founding Rome, and he, as Hejduk (2009) sees, is connected to the ambiguous Typhoeus-slaying Jupiter as he strikes the mooring cables of the ship with his *fulmineus ensis* to leave Carthage (*Aen.* 4.579 f.).

Structural use of a cosmic cycle is also present in the Pentateuch (Clifford 1994), as well as in early Germanic literature, particularly *Beowulf* and the Icelandic Eddas (Dronke 1997). However, it is from the *De Rerum Natura* that the cyclical structure of the *Aeneid* most clearly draws inspiration, where the cycle of birth and death of individuals, plants, and animals, is now that of civilizations and empires. In addition to Books 2 and 4, other parts of the poem are similarly connected to the cosmic cycle, like the foundation attempts of Book 3 or the later destruction of the Italic peoples to make way for Rome. In all of these, allusions to cosmogony, Gigantomachy, and elemental order place the narrative in the overarching framework of world renewal. This constant reinforcement of deconstruction and re-creation highlights Vergil's own authorial task, and presents a metaphor for the poetic deconstruction of preceding sources and their reconstruction his masterpiece.

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