

The Role of *ars* in Vergil's *Aeneid* ' These will be your arts, Roman...' (6.852)

This paper examines Vergil's use of the word *ars* within his *Aeneid*, as well as the implications of the word's various contextual meanings on our understanding of and interpretation of the work as a whole. Previous scholarship has assessed the concept of *ars* as it refers to physical depictions of art throughout the epic—the ekphrasis of the Temple of Juno at 1.441-463 appearing first among them, later crowned with the climactic description of Aeneas's shield at 8.626-728 (see Hardie, 1986)—as well *ars* and *artes* not as depictions of static art, but as skills, elements of change, or even the *mille nocendi artes* of Juturna (7.338), Allecto, and especially Juno. I argue that the link between these two seemingly irreconcilable interpretations is poetry itself, early established with Vergil's authorial voice and strengthened as we land with Aeneas in Italy. It is at this point in the epic at which Vergil's *maius opus* (7.45), his Iliadic foray into the world of war, carries with it all the implications of *ars* as a reflection of two opposing forces within the work. *Ars* in Vergil's masterwork is not only a means for the contemplation of the beauty of sadness at a distance or *inani pictura* at 1.464 (see Parry, 2000), but also a bringer of chaos, both creating *and* destroying, rendering Vergil's own *ars* equally elusive to interpret.

Vergil first links poetry with *ars* at the Temple of Juno (1.441-463), where the Trojans' pathos-inducing visit to the Carthaginian temple demonstrates a distinct link between ekphrasis and artistic self-consciousness (see Barchiesi, 1997): for the Trojans "*artificumque manus inter se operumque laborem/ miratur,*" marvel at the *artists' hand* and the *effort* of producing art. Vergil draws an immediate connection between art as both beautiful and painful, and we are acutely aware of the potential for destruction and of art's role in portraying that destruction as we participate in Aeneas and his comrades' pain, signaling a relationship between *ars* as static "art," and *ars* as "not art" at all (see Putnam, 2001).

These polar meanings become problematic—or, most interesting— when taken in light of one of the most famous lines in Roman literature, where Vergil famously enjoins his hero Aeneas to *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos* (6.852-3). These are the tenets, Anchises tells his son, upon which Aeneas must establish a fledgling Rome: *haec tibi erunt artes* (6.852). Vergil’s particular use of *artes* in this context is not altogether unexpected; *artes* might be art itself, but may of course also come to mean skills, techniques, methods, or even conduct, as in Book VI. *Artes* here *are* problematic, though, when viewed in light of Juturna’s destruction, Juno’s desperate delaying of fate, or, early on in Book I, Venus’ trick of changing Cupid into Ascanius—a ‘counterpoint’ to Allecto’s own later shape shifting (Putnam, 2001). What do these opposing meanings bode, then, for the *Romani*? Is art, Vergil prompts his reader to ask, really unable to affect change of any kind within the epic, or outside of it (see Bartsch, 1998)?

As Jupiter “takes the reins” at 12.873-4, with Juturna asking herself “*qua tibi lucem/ arte morer?*” (12.873-4), and Aeneas invites Turnus to “*verte omnis tete in facies et contrahe quidquid/ sive animis sive arte vales*” at 12.891-2, we are left with a distinct idea of what to think when the word *ars* itself appears throughout the poem. Roman *artes* are “*spirantia...aera*” (6.847). They are life itself, not static representations of life. The poet’s characters answer to his authorial voice, bending towards his needs at the time: even Jupiter, whom Vergil binds with the strictures of epic poetry, within the confines of meter. *Ars*, and by association, the *Aeneid* itself, as Vergil has built it—a shape-shifting, elusive *opus*—becomes void of one meaning, ineffectual edifice as well as psychologically suggestive, confining and setting free, propaganda as well as commentary on the chaotic *artes* of Vergil’s time.

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