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## Perception and Power

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# PERCEPTION AND POWER

Marisela F. Nyoka

Language represents thought; it is both a description of an idea and an attempt to delineate the surroundings perceived as reality; it is how humans create and order stimuli received. By shaping these stimuli, we try to control our environment and make sense of it, consequently creating a reality in which to function. But this reality exists only within space marked by language. Therefore, humans mold their world by creating language systems through which they also try to explain the unknown forces. Thus, it is of paramount importance and always necessary to preserve such reality and guard it from any external forces that could bring chaos within it.

Virgil in the *Aeneid* uses a Roman approach to a Greek cosmos. The language used transforms the received cosmology ever so carefully. The texture of the meaning expressed appeals to a wider audience; it is both pleasing aesthetically and a gesture toward the 'Roman aristocracy and Augustus' goals for power.

The hero in the *Aeneid* is epic enough, properly of divine descent, but different. He reflects the political changes and the mood of the times. Virgil relates his perception of a

new order, the conquest of new lands, and the cultures encountered. Ultimately, Virgil describes a uniquely Roman relation to heavenly forces.

Even though the structure and form of the *Aeneid* evoke passages found in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the flavor is of another time. Hesiod's genealogy of the Gods inspires Virgil to gradually and painstakingly infuse the Gods with their Roman character. Even more, Aeneas' encounter with the souls whose purpose is to be reborn, in Book VI of the *Aeneid*, is similar to Er's tale narrated by Socrates in Plato's *Republic* (614-16).

Power, then, is conveyed in a Roman way. The reflective nature of Aeneas is ever present in his actions. He is the new Roman hero, different from the Greek hero. He feels, weeps, fears, and most of all he doubts. Nevertheless, he always returns, obedient to divine power through his filial love and unconditional respect for his father. A new cosmos is born; it fits the forces and people shaping it, Romans.

Virgil eloquently crafts and frames this new reality. He turns the Greek model, once considered the best and worthy to be emulated, into contrasting shades of moral values. Aeneas is a warrior indeed, but a rhetorical warrior. Like Achilles, he possesses great strength; unlike Achilles, he is able to conquer his passions, his desires, those unknown and overwhelming forces that are the realm of women. Women bring chaos, challenge the divine order, and disregard the logical process of discernment. The Roman warrior has strength different from Achilles. Turnus, the "second Achilles," who would have been a perfect warrior in the *Iliad*, is compared slightly to the Roman hero (ix. 730-63). Even though Turnus fights for the right Greek values, the comparison with the reluctant, questioning Aeneas is striking. Aeneas takes time to think, and considers the moral implications. Also, he takes his culture and his people into consideration, while Turnus is driven by his passions (Book xii).

Moreover, the Greek reality is well established; it only need be recalled. By properly invoking the Muse of Memory, the force of culture comes to the aid and brings under control any undesirable situation. Thus, power, divine and human, are properly in place. By contrast the story of Aeneas does not begin with a proper invocation

to the Gods through the Muse of Memory. Aeneas, then, must create a past to ensure the birth of a Latin nation. To establish continuity, the Romans must create their world. Anchises, Aeneas' father, is the guide and provider of the experiences necessary for the creation of this new Roman cosmos.

Simultaneously, Virgil further explores the duality and ambiguity of the heavenly powers. Aeneas respects the divine will, but his relationship to the Gods is of another kind. Hence, his personal responsibility increases. However, if he submits to these powers and their guidance, he will succeed.

Aeneas has a special kind of problem. He has the gift of persuasion and of logical reflection, but he needs a heroic past. Therefore, he must journey like Odysseus, but his is simultaneously an introspective journey.

Within the new Roman cosmos, Trojans are guided to a greater destiny. Even though the Trojans are not winners, according to Greek standards, Virgil brings them to a victorious end. He molds Aeneas' Trojan ancestry into a new kind of hero, who values self-control and seeks peace. Hence, Trojans endure, suffer, and survive, in spite of the obstacles encountered. Although Aeneas appears reluctant at times, he returns to fulfill his destiny, inspired by a divine ethereal presence.

Aeneas' reluctance toward his destiny and his knowledge of its inevitability, bring to light the philosophical forces in Virgil's life. Stoicism filters through as Virgil relates the tribulation Romans must endure before they reach their destination. Aeneas' lack of enthusiasm is markedly not the passion of a Greek warrior. Instead, Aeneas questions, submitting only with a controlled demurrer in stoic loyalty to the divine order. After all, it cannot be altered.

When Aeneas finally descends to the Underworld, after leaving Dido, his destiny becomes clearer. As he goes through the dark, shadowy place, he comes face to face with his ancestry, his present, and his future. The never-ending triad of human existence is verbalized. The hierarchy of his cosmos projects into the future. Ultimately, God's power concentrates in one unit of three forces: father, son and spirit. The past, present, and future become male forces of reason. Dido, then, was only a temptation, a test to his loyal

piety, since she represents the unknown, the foreign forces—passion.

The shade of the underworld is duality. Dark and light co-exist in the same space. Life is duality; the choices, however, are in the hands of humans. Nevertheless, the right choice is only in the hands of the pious. Aeneas is a hero even though the price is suppression of his desires. He must follow the right path at all costs. All emotional forces, including sexual forces, belong to the Underworld; although they can bring inspiration, they can also bring chaos.

On the other hand, women in the *Aeneid* are strong and possess diverse powers, although they are in some measure restricted. The Gods' permission is necessary. They are also the power within the Furies realm, and there is always danger of doom. As in Euripides' *Medea*, women cause the conflicts between reasonable men, and women are the destroyers, as well. Thus, the gods do not present many choices. The Roman cosmos runs by means of the control of passion through reason. After all, the survivors whose purpose is to carry the new nation to victory are the triad of male forces. Aeneas' mother is prematurely sent to Hades, so later she can explain her role as an invisible passive presence. Even Camilla's strength is almost motherly devotion (Book xi).

Virgil expresses the feminine qualities as something to be wary of, not only in the world of men, but in the Gods as well. Women trade, entice, deceive, and also offer sexual rewards. Dido and the divine Juno are driven by passion.

Thus the *Aeneid* is a representation of a world in transition not only politically but religiously as well. Virgil uses the Greek model to improve it. He is Hesiod, the poet creator of "pastoral melody." He teaches his people "how to obey the most exacting tillers of the soil," like Hesiod in the *Works and Days* (the *Aeneid*, Book i).

In sum, Virgil uses language in a way less constricted more fluid than the Greeks. Homer, and Greek writing generally, is more mathematical, precise. They put special attention on symmetry, and shape (geometry), giving to their writing a sense of equational result. Furthermore, Virgil is more introspective; he describes the world of abstract ideas. Therefore, the Gods are projected outwardly in a unity of three forces. In this cosmos, humans have a greater task. They must

interpret by reasoning and be truthful to these heavenly forces.  
Ultimately only the pious will survive.