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DIRETTA DA D'ARCO S. AVALLE, FRANCESCO BRANCIFORTI, GIANFRANCO FOLENA, FRANCESCO SABATINI, CESARE SEGRE, ALBERTO VARVARO

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The *Roman d'Énéas*: Implications of the 'Prologue'

As has been frequently observed, the prologue to an Old French romance customarily begins with a *sententia* or perhaps a proverb. Alternatively, it might remind the reader of a model *exemplum* or prepare him for what follows by briefly outlining the subject matter. At times, the *exordium* names the hero or calls attention to the source from which it says the text is derived. The author often signs his name at this point, and/or emphasizes his *persona* in some relevant fashion. The prologue is consequently an important set-piece with respect to the remainder of the poem: its rôle is usually to define the speaker's and the reader's attitudes toward a circumscribed *matière*[1]. However, when we look at the beginning of the twelfth-century *Roman d'Énéas* (ca. 1150-5?), everything of this sort seems to be missing[2].

Our poet begins by reminding his audience ever so briefly of the Fall of Troy. He provides a synopsis of that story's plot in order, it would seem, to situate the on-going account of the Trojan race. The summary is perfectly innocuous, totally neutral. In situating his episode of the saga in light of what immediately went before it, the poet presents himself as someone serving that particular history by relating it in strict chronological order. Nothing (apparently) could be more straightforward. In consequence, there is no need here for the expression of a high degree of self-consciousness. Craft, one assumes, is not fundamentally at issue.

The absence of self-consciousness and of specific concern with

[1] For further details concerning the characteristics of Old French romance prologues, see the following: E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, tr. W. R. Trask, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1973); E. Faral, *Les Arts poétiques du XII^e et du XIII^e siècle. Recherches et documents sur la technique littéraire du moyen âge*, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, Paris, Champion, 1924; T. Hunt, «The Rhetorical Background to the Arturian Prologue: Tradition and the Old French Vernacular Prologues», *FMLS* 6 (1970): 1-28; id., «Tradition and Originality in the Prologues of Chrestien de Troyes», *FMLS* 7 (1972): 320-44.

[2] All quotations from this poem will be taken from *Eneas. Roman du XII^e siècle*, éd. J.-J. Salverda de Grave, 2 vols., CFMA, Paris, Champion, 1964 and 1968.

craft, however, is felt with particular force when one compares the initial lines of the *Énéas* to those of the *Roman de Troie* or to the beginning of either Wace's *Rou* or the *Roman de Thèbes* (both, in many respects, textual congeners of the *Énéas*). In our poem the accent appears to be placed on history recounted by a self-effaced narrator figure — a technique similar to the one used, e.g., in the Oxford *Roland*, where the initial *laisse* situates briefly Charlemagne's history in Spain before focusing on Roland's final battle. This procedure would seem appropriate. It is fitting to translate, or rather to transpose, the Vergilian epic into the code of Old French epic technique, especially if the goal is to praise a new kind of emperor and the continuation of the Augustan dynasty in the person of Henry II Plantagenet, of England.

The only other (roughly contemporary) prologue — or opening statement — comparable to the *Énéas* with which I am familiar is to be found at the start of Wace's *Brut*, a book that openly 'continues' the history which the *Énéas* poet 'had transmitted'. But the *Brut*, at least, makes an attempt at calling together its audience, at outlining the material, at signing, and at identifying the poet-narrator in eight initial lines before giving a summary of the stories of Troy and Aeneas. An equivalent statement is absent from our *Roman d'Énéas*.

Just how, then, does the *Énéas* poet proceed with his historical account? He pictures Menelaus laying siege to, and capturing, Troy. He laid waste the kingdom and ravaged the land «por la vanjance de sa feme» (v. 4). This motivation stands out when confronted with Wace's explanation as given in the *Brut*: «Pur la vanjance de Paris» (v. 12) [3]. The *Énéas* poet presumably would like his audience to understand the destruction of a city, of a kingdom, in the light of a husband avenging his wife, not as an act of revenge directed against the rival who cuckolded him. This point is repeated at the close of the first movement of the poem: «Menelaus a vanjance prise: | toz fist les murs aplanoier | por le tort fait de sa moillier» (vv. 22ff.). The poet switches from the outraged husband's destruction of Troy to Énéas as the latter leaves the city, advised by his mother, Venus, to go back to the place of origin of his race. Énéas takes counsel, in true Old

[3] Wace, *Le Roman de Brut* éd. I. Arnold, 2 vols. SATF, Paris, Firmin Didot, 1938 and 1940.

French epic fashion, with his men under a tree: Should they stay or leave? All agree — in a decidedly anti-epic mode — «miaus s'an volent o lui foïr | que retorner anz por morir» (vv. 75f.). So they head out to the open sea, in fully-provisioned ships.

Although techniques akin to those of the *chanson de geste* do find their way into this account of Troy and the introduction of the protagonist, Énéas is clearly not the epic hero we are accustomed to; he is definitely neither a Roland nor a William. Perhaps, then, the ideal Énéas serves is not on a par with that for which Roland is willing to give up his life. Consequently, an undermining of the epic quality of Vergil's history becomes apparent in the ninety lines[4] of Introduction. Unquestioning fealty on the poet's part in serving this particular history seems, to say the least, a bit shaky. Furthermore, the unassuming quality of these initial lines, which, we recall, are based on the poet's decision to follow the chronological order of events, known as the *ordo facilis* in the manuals of the time, comes into question at v. 93.

Here our poet begins, finally, to follow Vergil's example somewhat more closely. Vergil's narrator in his first pages is quite concerned with the figure of Juno as she torments Aeneas and slows him down in his quest. The *Énéas* poet gets to this point at v. 93; he tells us that Juno hates all those who are from Troy because of the «jugemant que fist Paris» (v. 97). At v. 100 the narrator unveils a certain self-consciousness concerning his job of narration. He underscores the fact that he chooses now to make a digression in which he will relate the reasons for Juno's hatred; he declares that he will relate, in abbreviated form, the story of the Judgment of Paris: «L'acheison de cel jugemant | voil reconter asez briemant» (vv. 99f.). It should not go unnoticed that at this point the hitherto invisible narrator becomes, in effect, a *persona* (i.e., a first-person participant in the narration). By making his audience more specifically aware of him in conjunction with a digression that will treat traditional mythological material in such a fashion, in fact, as to amplify greatly upon Vergil's brief mention of the cause of Juno's ire, he assumes a more substantial rôle as one in charge of the narrative. For the Anglo-Norman public of the twelfth century, such mythological

[4] Ninety-two lines if one includes vv. 17f., inserted (between brackets) by Salverda de Grave but, as he explains (vol. II, p. 138), omitted in MSS *AB*.

material was diametrically opposed to whatever historical implications were being treated in the first ninety lines as possible. Can there be any doubt that the Judgment of Paris was unambiguous fiction, and an amusing fiction — perceived as such — at that?

The *Énéas* poet-narrator occupies some eighty-two lines in his treatment of the Judgment of Paris, i.e., the segment ends ninety lines after the narrator had left Énéas and his men out in the open sea. Equal time — or space — has, we see, been devoted to this mythological excursus which serves as an explanation for the Fall of Troy (which is now in the past), for Énéas' torments at sea (the present circumstances), and for the upcoming interlude with Dido. Exactly ninety lines later (at v. 270), Énéas lifts his eyes and observes the shores of Libia: «se vit de Libe lo païs» (v. 272); the first true adventure can now get underway.

Looked at in this manner, what the *Énéas* poet prepared is an introductory movement in three parts. The Judgment of Paris digression, introduced personally by the poet-narrator, constitutes the Middle Section of the triptych. The digression thereby gets the spotlight; *it* is the center of interest, *not* the historical recapitulation of the Trojan story or the launching of a questionable hero into the unknown. The Judgment of Paris segment interrupts the flow between history, i.e., the account of Troy, and Énéas' adventures. It filters the action and mediates between Énéas and the historical context. Furthermore, since the Judgment of Paris is ushered into the text in order to explain the *cause* of Juno's antipathy for Troy and its descendants, by telling us this myth as a digression, out of sequence, the poet-narrator imposes upon his audience a necessary shift in the way it must view what it has been reading (or listening to) so far. The *Énéas* poet does not follow, then, a chronological order; he has not adopted the 'easy style', but rather the *ordo difficilis* (or *artificialis*). This revelation of a new order places the emphasis squarely on the digression, on the poet-narrator's presence, and, implicitly as well, on the way he has structured his material in order to reorient the reader with respect to it. If, instead, the poet had opted for a conventional prologue, beginning, say, with a proverb and/or the *exemplum* of the Judgment of Paris, the tension between an historical account and a playful discourse concerning a fiction would have been lost. By not pronouncing himself in the summary, the poet-narrator is free to announce himself, though not

too loudly and without a signature, in the handling of this different sort of material. By not specifically citing his source in the opening lines, he is at liberty not to do so in the Judgment of Paris digression where, we observe, he puts together a number of sources: Vergil, Ovid, and Donatus. By surfacing in the use of a first-person verb — *voil* — the poet-narrator retains the freedom to align himself with the clerkly procedures of digression, explanation, and the display of traditional lore, in counter-distinction to an unquestioning fealty to the rather more historical material of the Fall of Troy.

If we consider the opening lines immediately after our reading of the Judgment of Paris, that is, if we consider the summary concerning Menelaus and Énéas next to the digression on Paris, we might conclude that the first ninety lines constitute a false start. The 'real prologue' begins with Juno and with the surfacing of the narrator-*persona*, just as matters began in Vergil. Or, on the other hand, we might see the two sets of ninety lines as two starts, as two prologues to two different stories, or, at least, to two different strand of the story, that, like their respective Introductions, stand in tension in regard to one another and participate in a relationship wherein the second, underlying, digressive strand explains and originates — generates, or assumes responsibility for — the first.

Let us now look at what the second set of ninety lines brings to the picture. The first set painted for us the destruction of a city in the context of an adulterous love-triangle — Menelaus, Helen, Paris — and introduced our not-too-heroic protagonist. The Judgment of Paris presents the origins of that triangle by introducing another set of three. In this case, the three goddesses Juno, Pallas, and Venus among whom Paris must choose. The problem before him is theoretically a beauty contest. Paris is to choose the fairest of the three and present her with a golden apple upon which the epithet «fairest» is inscribed. In fact, however, no beauty contest takes place at all. Rather, each goddess in turn comes to Paris in secret and makes her pitch, trying to persuade, even bribe, him, by promising him the fruits of her particular powers. Juno promises riches; Pallas offers success in battle; and Venus assures Paris of the favors of the most beautiful woman on earth. Of course, we all know who wins and who becomes angered as a result. Why is it so important to our *Énéas* poet-narrator to devote so considerable an

amount of time in this particular place to this particular story? Perhaps it is because this *exemplum* fulfills the responsibilities of an orthodox prologue. I have already mentioned how it elaborates a tension with what precedes it. In addition, it presents a paradigm that the rest of the poem can augment. The pattern of the adulterous triangle can be carried on in subsequent episodes, filtered through projections of the Judgment of Paris. Énéas potentially may choose between Dido (who is the Queen of Juno's prosperous city of Carthage and who promised fidelity to her dead husband) and Camilla (who neither spins nor weaves but rather is depicted as a *bellatrix*, as a woman-warrior representing valor and victory in battle, and who is also described by the narrator as being not only a virgin but a couple sufficient unto herself in her 'androgeny' [5]) and, lastly, Lavinia (who represents Venusian qualities as she falls in love, serves Amors, and is available, though involved in a triangle with her suitors Turnus and Énéas). The three stages of the Introduction prepare the reader for a tripartite narrative, each involving the human representative, or projection, of each of the three goddesses. The quest for a New Troy in Italy must be understood in the context of Venus' victory in the Judgment of Paris. As a result of that victory, Venus is responsible for the break-up of a marriage, for the destruction of a kingdom, and for the near annihilation of a race. In the new set of triangles and in its accompanying set of choices, Venus atones for this first tragedy and ensuing chaos. By bringing Énéas safely to Laurentium and by engineering his victory and subsequent marriage to Lavinia, Venus succeeds in making good all three previous wrongs; and, to boot, she manages to grant Énéas the wishes, or powers, of both Juno and Pallas as these had been expressed to Paris.

But how does she accomplish all this? How does the poet-narrator depict Venus as she goes about the task of arranging this atonement for herself and this success for Énéas? How does this depiction work in light of the structure of the three-part Introduction?

For the answer to these questions we turn to yet another

5 Lo jor ert rois, la nuit raïne;
ja chanberiere ne meschine
anviron li le jor n'alast,
ne ja la nuit nus hom n'entrast
dedanz la chanbre ou ele estoit
(vv. 3977ff.).

passage which (a) is a digression, (b) treats mythological material, (c) concerns a story of adultery followed by manipulations on the part of Venus to win a contest while (d) restoring a couple in marriage in order (e) to establish a new kingdom and race. We turn from the Middle Section of the Introduction to the Middle Section of the entire poem. Here a scene is elaborately described in such a manner as to make a departure from Vergil's work and to bring about, as well as to undercut, the epic-type events that take place on another level. In short, we turn from the Judgment of Paris digression to the digression on Vulcan as he forges armor which will be responsible for Énéas' eventual victory over Turnus.

At v. 4297 Venus is worried about her son. She goes to her husband, Vulcan, just as she does in Vergil's poem, in order to ask him to forge new armor for Énéas that will make her son invincible. She promises Vulcan her love in exchange for his service in the exercise of his *mestier* (vv. 4335ff.). He agrees; and that night he sleeps with his wife, something which had not happened for some seven years. At this point the narrator interrupts the narrative in the same way he had interrupted at v. 99, to say «l'acheison de cel maltalant | voil demostrer asez briemant» (vv. 4353f.). The parallelism is striking. This intervention serves to introduce a digression, not included in Vergil, on the story of Venus and Mars. The source of this mythological account of adultery is found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Bk. IV). By exchanging her favors for his acceding to her request, Venus makes up for her own history as an adulteress. This atonement will lead to the reparation of Paris' fault and to a new, and legitimate, couple whose lineage will supposedly never end.

It is interesting that this Middle Section, echoing, as we saw, the corresponding part of the Introduction, concerns an artisan figure. The second narrative strand that began with the surfacing of the poet-narrator *persona* in an exercise of clerkly technique finds here a parallel in the description of the artisan who emerges in the middle of the narration in order to deploy his craft so that the crucial battle will have a successful outcome and the course of history be properly influenced. The alternate, seemingly, decorative, strand in both instances can be understood as that which is responsible for the other side of events.

An additional undercutting, or displacement, of purely historical considerations occurs as a result of our poet's postponement,

and replacement, of the description of the prophecies portrayed on Énéas' (or Aeneas') shield as narrated by Vergil. In the Old French poem, the description of Vulcan's work stresses the marvelous and extraordinary properties of the armor. No mention is made of the successful history of Énéas' heirs. The only representational accoutrements alluded to by the text are Vulcan's signature in gold lettering on the sword, which will slay Turnus, and the banner that Venus attaches to the *hante*, a love-token given to her by Mars and which depicts the contest between Pallas and Arachne. This last also derives, of course, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Bk. VI); it recounts the talents displayed by both contestants in the weaving of tapestries. The banner that portrays them will, in turn, be worn by Énéas into a battle where the explicit *non-weaver*, representing maidenhood and *chevalerie*, will encounter defeat. I refer of course to Camilla. Therefore, the only effects that preserve any of the representational qualities that are by and large eliminated from Vergil's epic reflect the two stories, or double digressions, that have just been narrated: Vulcan's professional craftsmanship and the affair between Venus and Mars. The pieces of armor that bear their imprints are deployed to eliminate that enemy who represents the goddess Pallas as well as Turnus, her ally. Once he has been removed, Venus' prize — Lavinia — is set free from the network of relationships locked in place by the love-triangle. The story of war and peace, eventually implicating the descendants of Énéas — the story chosen by Vergil to grace the shield and close his Bk. VIII — is retained by the medieval poet in a truncated form and shunted away to where it occupies the lines of his abrupt ending. Consequently, these lines echo, or perhaps repeat, the hollow resonances of the opening lines on the Fall of Troy.

In those opening lines, Prowess was divorced from Love, and Love from Marriage; and all of this was recalled by a narrator whose presence was muted. In the solution to the on-going treatment of this material, love, *chevalerie*, and the celebration of a continuous lineage come together once again in a manner allowing for the display of poetic craft. The author thus succeeded in transposing Vergil's epic not into the terms one associates with the Old French epic, but rather into the form of a new genre — a genre whose primary characteristic is to create a tension between historical material — of the type that an epic might well celebrate — and an Ovidian styled fiction. This kind

of tension, which undercuts historical pretensions and makes of itself (and for its own sake) *implicitly* but nevertheless *exactly* the raw material of fiction, is the anonymous *Énéas* poet's quiet, and creative, revolution. The revolution was both successful and effective. Many subsequent romancers — one need only cite the names of Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes — followed our poet's example in the derivation/construction of their own narratives [6].

MICHELLE A. FREEMAN
Columbia University, New York

[6] Daniel Poirion ha also underscored the importance of the shift from military to amorous interests, from historic to artistic concerns, in the medieval poet's original handling of mythology and poetic structure in the *Enéas*. For further considerations see his learned and enlightening «De l'*Enéide* à l'*Eneas*: mythologie et moralisation», *CCM* 19 (1976): 213-29.

* The present study constitutes the revised version of a paper I gave at the Kentucky Foreign Language Conference (April 1979).