Odds versus Evens: Civil War and the Price of Unity in *Aeneid* VIII

As one of the most analyzed passages of the *Aeneid*, the central episode of book 8, the struggle between Hercules and Cacus (8.190-267), yields differing interpretations. On the one hand, the apposition of Hercules and Cacus symbolizes a simple antithesis of good against evil. While Cacus represents the embodiment of evil (his name is derived from the Greek κακός) Hercules fills the role of the hero who defeats evil, restoring Arcadia to peace and stability (Hardie, 1986; O'Hara, 1996). Acknowledging this dualism, many scholars associate Cacus with various villains within the *Aeneid*, such as Turnus and Marc Antony, while Hercules is likened to heroes, particularly Aeneas and Augustus (Gransden, 1976; Galinsky, 1966; Galinsky, 1972). Thus, the episode has been read as a panegyric of August. Such unreservedly positive readings have been called into question, however. Lyne, for instance, interprets the episode as a demonstration that "good" force is just as destructive as "evil" force, deeming the passage a subversion of superficial propaganda (Lyne, 1987). I will seek to reconcile the two readings by examining the symbolism in Cacus' defeat, especially Virgil's attention to numbers, as well as the undeniable similarities between Hercules and Cacus. Ultimately, my reading suggests a positive interpretation of the episode that is darkened by the acknowledgement of the price of victory.

The significance of numbers is evident even in the book's structure. Book eight is full of triplets, from triadic arrangement of the book itself to permeating threefold imagery and language (Duckworth, 1954; Gransden, 1976). Smith takes the significance of numbers further, arguing for the victorious nature of the triplets, which culminate in the triple triumph of Augustus displayed on Aeneas' shield (Smith, 2011). But if triads permeate book 8, pairs or doubles are also prominent. I argue that the number two symbolizes internal strife and defeat,

which is overcome by the stabilizing force of single entities or triads. In book 8, biform creatures fall to the unified "ones" and "threes". Cacus, *semihomo* (8.194) and *semifer* (8.267), is defeated by Hercules. The biform and monstrous Egyptian gods fall to the unified front of the Olympic triad in the theomachy depicted on Aeneas' shield (8.698-700). The biformed pair, Antony and Cleopatra, yield to Octavian who is heralded by the building triplets of Book 8 and celebrated in triple triumph (8.714). The pairing of features in biform creatures is unnatural and monstrous, for its creation implies inherent fragmentation of two unified wholes. Another sort of monstrous "biformation" was book 4's possible Trojan-Carthaginian; Hercules' destruction of Cacus and his cave *regia* points to the destruction of Dido's longed for Carthaginian-Trojan society. Finally, a country undergoing civil war is the epitome of biform strife. Just as Cacus was subject to his own and Hercules' rage, so a nation in civil war is vulnerable to internal and external destructive forces. Interpreting the biform as a symbol of civil war, this episode reads as a panegyric of Augustus, who pulled Rome from civil war and unified her.

However, though the "good" wins and the "evil" loses, the assimilation of Hercules to Cacus problematizes this delineation. Hercules' descriptors are typical of Cacus: furious, vicious, and unrelenting (8.219, 228, 230). This assimilation is the price of victory. To overcome civil war, *furor* is necessary. Heroes fight like villains because such struggle is necessary for peace. Aeneas' shield depicts both. Through the Hercules-Cacus episode Virgil acknowledges but understands the harshness of the young Augustus. The violence and assimilation of the struggle echoes civil war, but also points to the necessity of a victor's harshness. Indeed, Augustus is described as having temples "vomiting flames", an exact descriptor of Cacus (8.680-681). But this is not a subversion of the hero, rather an acknowledgement of human nature and the necessary price of victory. Unity is established through *furor*, which wounds the society, as

Hercules and Cacus' struggle marred the landscape of Arcadia with shattered mountains (8.191). Virgil praises the heroes, but colors victory with tragedy, acknowledging the price of unity from civil war.

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