

The Muses' Playground

Lecture 6

Telling old tales

- Book 1 has shown us clearly that Vergil aims for an epic to compete with Homer
 - Generic markers
 - Content
- Book 2 shows us how Vergil will handle the re-write of familiar and traditional material, and make it contribute to a new and innovative text
- While Book 1 is broken up in several segments, Book 2 is the first extended narrative



Connections

- *Aen.* 1, 2, and 3 have clear connections to the *Odyssey*
- Content: The gods take counsel and make plans for the characters, details of the sea journey and adventures (*Aen.* 3)
- Narrative structure: Like Odysseus' *Apologia*, Aeneas tells of the fall of Troy in retrospect, also at a banquet with an erotically charged subplot
 - Nausicaa / Dido

Connections

- Characterisation/reactions: The grief of the hero
 - Aeneas: *'O queen, the sorrow you bid me bring to life again is past all words, the destruction by the Greeks of the wealth of Troy and of the kingdom that will be mourned forever, and all the horrors I have seen, and in which I played a large part. No man could speak of such things and not weep.'*
 - Odysseus: *'So sang the famous bard. And Odysseus' heart melted, and tears poured from his eyes. He wept pitifully, as a woman weeps who throws herself on her husband's dying body, fallen in front of his city and people, trying to ward off that evil moment from the city and his own children: watching him gasping for breath in dying, she clings to him and screams aloud, while behind her the enemy beat her back and shoulders with their spears: then she is led into captivity to endure a life of toil and suffering, her cheeks wasted pitifully with grief. He hid the falling tears from all except Alcinous, who, aware because he sat by him, noticed all, and heard him sighing deeply.'*

Connections and contrast

- Odysseus closely linked to the fall of Troy
 - The Trojan horse + one of very few survivors
 - Aeneas is established as being an epic hero of his proportion
- The viewpoint is of course different: Book 2 has been said to give the ‘poetry of defeat from the point of view of the defeated’ (Bowra, 1945, 41) in a unique fashion
- However, for Odysseus, the grief is in the present but the cause of it in the past – Aeneas still has his struggle before him

The character of Aeneas

- Function of the 'flashbacks': character development
 - Odysseus: from rashness to calculation?
 - Or is it all just the Odysseus the con-man staging his own appearance?
 - Aeneas: from dependency to independence?
- The 2nd and 3rd books are vital in the characterisation of Aeneas: together they show that this is 'a new hero for a new epic' (Johnson, 1999, 53)

Reluctant take-over

It was the time when rest, the most grateful gift of the gods, was first beginning to creep over suffering mortals, when Hector suddenly appeared before my eyes in my sleep, full of sorrow and streaming with tears. He looked as he did when he had been dragged behind the chariot, black with dust and caked with blood, his feet swollen where they had been pierced for the leather thongs. What a sight he was! How changed from the Hector who had thrown Trojan fire on to the ships of the Greeks or come back clad in the spoils of Achilles! His beard was filthy, his hair matted with blood, and he had on his body all the wounds he had received around the walls of his native city. In my dream I spoke to him first, forcing out my words, and I too was weeping and full of sorrow. 'O light of Troy, best hope and trust of all the Trojans, what has kept you so long from us? From what shores have you come? With what eyes do we look upon you in our weariness after the death of so many of your countrymen, after all the sufferings of your people and your city? What has so shamefully disfigured the face that was once so serene? What wounds are these I see?'

- Emphasis on the loss of Hector
 - Key intertexts are both Greek and Roman giants : *Iliad*, Ennius' *Andromache*
 - The latter may explain the gruesome details: *I saw what I could hardly bear to see, Hector dragged by a four-horse chariot. Enn. Andr. Fr. 78*
- Aeneas looking back, identifying Hector as the 'light of Troy', rather than anyone living – or himself

Shifting focus

There was no reply. He paid no heed to my futile questions, but heaved a great groan from the depths of his heart and said: 'You must escape, son of the goddess. You must save yourself from these flames. The enemy is master of the walls and Troy is falling from her highest pinnacle. You have given enough to your native land and to Priam. If any right hand could have saved Troy, mine would have saved it. Into your care she now commends her sacraments and her household gods. Take them to share your fate. Look for a great city to establish for them after long wanderings across the sea.' These were his words, and he brought out in his own hands from her inmost shrine the mighty goddess Vesta with the sacred ribbons on her head and her undying flame.

- Futile questions – asking about the past gets you nowhere
- Troy's story is Hector's story
- *...but by using Hector to convey a message about the future of the people, Vergil also implies that it will live on*
- The wanderings and the city to be established is Aeneas'
- The task is partly a religious responsibility; this scene will become important later
- Obstacles – Hector's words alert us to them (sea journey adventures like Odysseus?), but details in the following make obvious that Aeneas' challenges are more subtle

What Aeneas has to contend with

- *Aen.* 2.300: Although the house of my father Anchises stood apart and was screened by trees...
- *Aen.* 2.310: Then in that moment I knew the truth. The treacherous scheming of the Greeks was there to see.
- *Aen.* 2.315: Mindlessly, I put on my armour, for reason had little use for armour, but my heart was burning to gather comrades for battle.
- *Aen.* 2.335: I went where I was driven by the words of Panthus and the will of the gods, into the fighting and the flames, where the grim Fury of war called me.
- *Aen.* 2.352: Let us die. Let us rush into the thick of the fighting.

Aeneas' prompts

- Hector's ghost
 - Death of Priam: 'Then for the first time I knew the horror that was all about me. What was I to do?'
- Rage against Helen and Venus' appearance: temporary escape
- Omen from Jupiter via Ascanius
 - Cf. allusion to Andromache
 - Role of Iulus here
- It is important to note that at this point, Aeneas still needs to be prompted to act
- Torn between continuing to let the story of Troy play out, and addressing the future
- It is only after these prompts that we see Aeneas in the famous first scene illustrating his piety
- Later: ghost of Creusa
- If you leave us here, what fate is waiting for little Iulus, for your father and for the woman who used to be called your wife? [..] when suddenly there was a great miracle. At the very moment when we were both holding Iulus and he was there between our sorrowing faces, a light began to stream from the top of the pointed cap he was wearing and the flame seemed to lick his soft hair and feed round his forehead without harming him. (*Aen.* 2.678-688)

Aeneas group Augustus Forum



Effects on the reader

Fall of Troy - present

- Dramatic irony – we know what Aeneas will become
 - ‘Spare yourself these fears, my lady from Cytherea. You can be sure that the destiny of your descendants remains unchanged. You will see the city of Lavinium and its promised walls. You will take great-hearted Aeneas up to the stars of heaven’ (*Aen.* 1.257-260)
 - Omens both in Book 2 and 3 underline the trajectory of Aeneas’ story as known to the reader, but are only menacing to the characters
 - Structuring device
- Does that make us focus more on his shortcomings in the early books, that he doesn’t live up to preconceptions?

Fall of Troy – retold at Carthage

- Cf. Odysseus’ stories in front of Alcinoos and Arete
 - Subtext of making Odysseus seem special, a good bet
- Impact of the space given to his conflicting wishes: Aeneas is still liable to being sucked into the past – reacting rather than acting
 - Subtext: Aeneas is but a representative for his exiled people

Intersection of Books 2 and 3

Aen. 3.1-12: When the gods had seen fit to lay low the power of Asia and the innocent people of Priam, when proud Ilium had fallen and all Neptune's Troy lay smoking on the ground, we were driven by signs from heaven into distant exile to look for a home in some deserted land. There, hard by Antandros under the Phrygian mountain range of Ida, we were mustering men and building a fleet without knowing where the Fates were leading us or where we would be allowed to settle. The summer had barely started and Father Anchises was bidding us to hoist sail and put ourselves in the hands of the Fates. I wept as I left the shores of my native land and her harbours and the plains where once had stood the city of Troy. I was an exile taking to the high seas with my comrades and my son, with the gods of our house and the great gods of our people.

- Note that Aeneas does not actively gather followers and is described as 'yielding' from his wish to help the city (2.800ff) at the end of Book 2
- Anchises continues in many ways to be the leader of the Trojans

Aeneas and Andromache



Aeneas and Andromache

- After a rest period in Leukas, the Trojans proceed to Buthrotus
- Aen. 3.288 identifies Aeneas as a victorious captain even in defeat: *Aeneas dedicates these arms taken from the conquering Greeks*
- This sentence might indicate a change in how we should perceive the character, but he has one important test ahead:
- Andromache's mini Troy

Recreating Troy?

- *[...] on the banks of a false Simois I caught sight of Andromache, offering a ritual meal and performing rites to the dead*
 - (adapted from West but keeping the Latin sequence)
- *I am indeed alive. [...] What you see is true.*
- *What has fallen to the lot of Hector's Andromache?*
- Andromache's toy Troy immediately causes the reader to worry
- Andromache and Aeneas are immediately established as polar opposites: she is connected to death...
 - Cf. blurring of boundaries in 3.310ff
 - Continued identification of her as Hector's wife
- ...and he with life: *vivo equidem* (3.315)

Background: Andromache in Book 2

There was a forgotten entrance at the rear, a secret doorway which joined the different parts of Priam's palace. While the kingdom of Troy still stood, poor Andromache often used to come this way unattended to visit Hector's parents, taking her son Astyanax to see his grandfather.

- Intertexts: *Iliad* 6
- Characterisation: cf. Hector's story = Troy's story = the past
- 'poor Andromache', 'used to'
- Denied a future: Astyanax' murder evoked by the descriptions of Pyrrhus' killing of Priam

Promises of the future

- *What about your boy Ascanius? Is he alive and breathing the air?*
- *She was weeping her useless tears*
- *As I walked I recognized a little Troy, a citadel modelled on great Pergamum, and a dried-up stream they called the Xanthus. There was the Scaean gate and I embraced it. Nor were my Trojans slow to enjoy this Trojan city with me.*
- *Day after day wore on with breezes tempting our sails*
- *-> Aeneas seeks Helenus' advice*
- Andromache's grief channelled in her focus on Ascanius as the one to carry on the Trojan legacy
- Continual reminders that living in the past is unproductive
- Focalisation through Aeneas' character
- ...but still he gets carried away
- Note the passive phrasing in the bottom quote
- Yet that stands in contrast to the confident prophecy delivered for Aeneas by Helenus

Aeneas and the future

- Helenus' prophecy clearly directed to Aeneas and the seer's confidence in him is transferred to the reader
- Yet in 472 it is *Anchises* who orders the fitting out of the ships and who gives crucial orders when under way
- Note also that when Andromache passes on gifts specifically designed as carriers of Trojan heritage, they are given to Ascanius, not to Aeneas
 - Because of Andromache's connection to Ascanius?
 - Reminding us of the crucial role of Ascanius in the relationship between Dido and Aeneas, as initiated in Book 1
 - Implications for the reader's view of Aeneas

Aeneas at peace?

- *Anchises' death in Sicily: I lost my father Anchises who had been my support in every difficulty and disaster*
- *With this my long course was run. From here I sailed, and God drove me upon your shores.*
- *At last he was silent. Here he made an end and was at peace.*
- Andromache's toy Troy has outlined one option for us: the ending of Book 3 asks whether Aeneas will take it.