The Muses' Playground: Vergil's Intertexts

A) Reception of Homer:

● Vergil engaging with interpretations of Homer (e.g. Achilles' anger over Briseis could be seen as erotically motivated: cf. Turnus' anger over losing Lavinia?)
● Vergil responding to scholarly criticism of passages (cf. Schlunk)

1) "But the wind parried it, for Saturnian Juno deflected the speeding danger, and the spear flew in into the gate" (*Aen*. 9.745-46: Juno, seen as goddess of air, deflects Pandarus' spear from Turnus)

2) "But Athene blew it [the spear] away from glorious Achilleus, with the lightest puff of breath" (*Il*. 20.438-9: line criticised by e.g. Herakleon and Eustathius)

● moral/social critique of Homer (see e.g. Plato *Republic*, 390e on Achilles' moral faults) > Aeneas away from battle because searching for allies; Aeneas reluctant to kill Turnus and doesn't mutilate corpse

● Aeneas' world more like Roman in concern with social protocols (e.g. Odysseus himself lugs a deer back, *Od.* 10.157: contrast *Aen*. 1.180-194)

3) "an epic hero does not lug dead animals on his back." (Mueller 2009: 191, of the *Aeneid*)

● The challenge: Homer (father of epic; fount of all wisdom): works allegorized e.g. shield as universe (bordered by ocean Hom. *Iliad* 18.607-8)

4) "it will appear that he [Homer] was privy to every rational science and art, and that he supplied many starting-points and, so to speak, seeds in all manner of verbal and practical skills to those that came after him, a model not only for poets but also for the authors of historical and theoretical prose works." (pseudo-Plutarch, *On the life and poetry of Homer* B 6)

5) "On it he [Hephaistos] made the earth, and sky, and sea, the weariless sun and the moon waxing full, and all the constellations that crown the heavens, Pleiades and Hyades, the mighty Orion and the Bear" (Hom. *Iliad* 18.483-7, of Achilles' shield)

6) "The god of fire .. is an allegory of the demiurgic fire which creates the universe; the account of the making of the circular shield is an allegory .. of the creation of the spherical universe. The forging of the Shield takes place at night, a night which represents the chaos which preceded the separation of the elements. The four metals of which the Shield is made represent the four elements...The cities, one at peace and one at war, are allegories of Empedocles' cosmological principles of ... 'Love' and ... 'Strife'...." (P. Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*, 340-1 on allegorical interpretations)

Aeneas' shield (bordered by ocean): Vergilian exploitation of cosmic resonance (Roman world= the world)

7) "There the God of Fire, with his knowledge of the prophets and of time that was to be, had laid out the story of Italy and the triumphs of the Romans" (Verg. *Aen*. 8.626-8, of Aeneas' shield)

8) "On them I impose no limits of time or place. I have given them an empire that will no know no end." (Verg. *Aen*. 1.278-80, Jupiter's prophecy)

B) Homer: case studies

● funeral games (4 events) of A*eneid* 5 (cf. 8 events of *Il*. 23; also *Od*. 8); prunes and makes fit Roman context

i) boat race (moral lesson: e.g. pious Cloanthus wins; raging Sergestus wrecks ship, Verg. *Aen*. 5.202-4)

9) "Sergestus sailed the great *Centaur* (he it was who gave his name to the Sergii), and Cloanthus, the founder of the Roman Cluentii, was in the blue-green *Scylla*." (Verg. *Aen*. 5.121-3: L. Sergius Catilina)

ii) boxing: no Roman ancestors; more interest than Homeric match (horror of blood-caked gloves; twist in aged Entellus' victory)

iii) archery: in Homer, Achaeans aim for dove tied to mast (Teukros cuts cord, Meriones shoots dove and arrow lands at his feet) > in Vergil, Mnestheus cuts rope, Eurytion hits dove, Acester (ruler of Sicily) sends arrow (patriotic)

10) "At this a sudden miracle appeared before their eyes, a mighty sign of what the future held in store. In times to come was the great fulfilment revealed ... As it flew through the vaporous clouds, the arrow burst into flames and marked its path with fire ..., like those stars that leave their appointed places and race across the sky trailing their blazing hair behind them as they fly." (Verg. *Aen*. 5.522-8, of Acestes' arrow: points to glorious future of Sicily and comet 44BC)

iv) foot race: Nisus and Euryalus as lovers (unHomeric though interpretation of Patroclus-Achilles relationship). Nisus helps Euryalus win (self-sacrifice) >Salius demands first prize, Euryalus protests, Diores complains

cf. Iliadic chariot race where Achilles suggests Eumelos, who crashed en route, should get second prize. > Antilochus objects since he would then forfeit his prize; Menelaos complains because Antilochus had forced him to slow down by his dangerous driving

11) "Nisus and Euryalus were first, Euryalus standing out for the bloom of his youthful beauty and Nisus for the loving care he showed to him." (Verg. *Aen*. 5.294-6)

12) "Here, as he [Nisus] pounded the track exulting in the very moment of victory, he lost his footing and fell on his face in the <u>filthy dung and blood from the sacrifice</u>. But he was not the man to forget Euryalus and the love he bore him. He rose from the slime and threw himself in the path of Salius and knocked him head over heels..." (Verg. *Aen*. 5.331-6)

13) "You know how a young man oversteps the mark- his mind works quickly, but his judgement is flimsy. So let your heart bear with me. I shall give up of my own accord the mare that I won." (Hom. *Il*. 23.589-92, Antilochus: acts for himself)

14) "Then as they were just about to dash in for the prize, Aias slipped in mid-course- Athene had fouled him- in a place where <u>dung</u> had been dropped by the bellowing <u>cattle which Achilleus had slaughtered</u> for Patroklos' funeral." (Hom. *Il*. 23.773-6)

● Nisus and Euryalus go on night expedition to give info to Aeneas, *Aeneid* 9 (reworks foot races of *Aeneid* 5 and *Iliad* 23; cf. *Iliad* 10 where Odysseus and Diomedes go to spy)

15) “he [Diomedes] began killing all around him. Terrible groans arose from the men... As a lion comes on an unshepherded flock of goats or sheep and springs on them with his heart set on slaughter, so Diomedes kept attacking the Thracians until he had killed twelve.” (Hom. *Il*. 10.483-8: kills king Rhesos and men)

16) “Nisus was like a lion driven mad with hunger and ravening through pens full of sheep, dumb with fear, while he growls from jaws dripping with blood as he mauls and champs their soft flesh.” (Verg. *Aen*. 9.339-41: kills king Rhamnes and others)

BUT end up more like Trojan spy Dolon, caught and killed by Odysseus and Diomedes. Dolon agreed to mission because of rewards; Euryalus' capture linked to his spoils

17) “They ... ran off into the trees, putting their trust in the darkness of the night” (Verg. *Aen*. 9.378: now running for life)

18) “This was too much for Nisus. Out of his mind with terror and unable to endure his anguish, he broke cover, shouting ...: ‘Here I am! ... Aim your weapons at me, you Rutulians!” (Verg. *Aen*. 9.424-8, Nisus sacrifices himself for his lover)

19) “stricken with grief and shocked by the sight of the heads of the comrades they knew so well, impaled on spears and dripping black gore.” (Verg. *Aen*. 9.471-2: Trojans see their heads)

NB unHomeric emotional tones: the fervent homosexual devotion, the emphasis on unmanly grief, lament (Euryalus' mother; narrator himself)

C) Apollonius: the non-martial side: love and magic

● Aeneas as Jason: arrives at Dido's court (cf. palace of Aeetes; covered in cloud: *A*. 1.587)

20) “He was like Apollo leaving his winter home in Lycia and the waters of the river Xanthus to visit his mother at Delos, there to start the dancing afain, while all around the altars gather noisy throngs of Cretans and Dryopes and painted Agathyrsians” (Verg. *Aen*. 4.143-6; AR 1.307-10, Jason like Apollo)

● Dido as Medea (cf. Briggs): in Apollonius, divine intervention of Aphrodite and Eros cf. Cupid

21) “Then he [Eros] crouched low at Jason’s feet, fitted the notch to the middle of the string, and drawing the bow as far as his hands would stretch, shot at Medea.” (Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* 3.281-4)

22) “like a wounded deer which a shepherd hunting in the woods of Crete has caught off guard, striking her from a long range with steel-tipped shaft; the arrow flies and is left in her body without his knowing it; she runs away all over the wooded slopes of Mount Dicte, and sticking in her side is the arrow that will bring her death” (Verg. *Aen*. 4.69-72: cf. Cupid's arrow and *Arg*. 4.12-13 Medea as deer)

● Medea/Jason and Dido/Aeneas consummation in cave

23) “they sang the hymeneal song in unison outside the bridal chamber to the clear notes of Orpheus’ lyre.” (Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* 4.1158-60)

24) “Dido and the leader of the Trojans took refuge together in the same cave. The sign was first given by Earth and by Juno as matron of honour. Fires flashed and the heavens were witness to the marriage while nymphs wailed on the mountain tops.” (Verg. *Aen*. 4.165-8)

● implications? Aeneas' relationship not legitimate; *Aeneid* cave scene warped parody of wedding. Jason will desert Medea. Consequences of break-up: infanticide/Dido's curse i.e. Punic wars

25) “Nor have I ever offered you marriage or entered into that contract with you.” (Verg. *Aen*. 4.338-9, Aeneas to Dido)

● magic
26) “She also sought out potent herbs with a milk of black poison in their rich stems and harvested them by moonlight with a bronze sickle.” (Dido pre-suicide, Verg. *Aen*. 4.513-4)

● pyre part of tradition but magic innovation: recalls Apollonius' Medea

27) “The flowers, which grew on twin stalks a cubit high, were of the colour of Corycian saffron, while the root looked like flesh that has just been cut, and the juice like the dark sap of a mountain oak. To make the ointment, Medea, clothed in black, in the gloom of night, had drawn off this juice in a Caspian shell...” (Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* 3.854-9)

● priestess recalls Medea (>more sympathy for Dido, who is distanced from magic)

28) “She [priestess] used to keep watch over the branches of the sacred tree and bring rich foods for the serpent, spreading the oozing honey and sprinkling the <u>sleep-bringing seeds</u> of the poppy.” (Verg. *Aen*. 4.484-5: evokes Medea who drugged fleece-guarding dragon)

<u>D) Tragedy</u>
NB previous tragedy in epic (Apollonius; Catullus 64)

● Dido as Greek and Roman tragic Medea (from Euripides' Medea and e.g. Ennius' Medea exul): like tragic Medea, powerful love-scorned, vengeful woman

29) “Could I not have put his men to the sword, and Ascanius, too, and served his flesh at his father's table?” (Dido, *Aen*. 4.601-2)

● metageneric markers for tragic intertexts: Carthaginians shown building theatre foundations (Carthage = backdrop to the setting of Dido's tragedy); simile; buskins; Venus' “prologue”

30) “she would be like Pentheus in his frenzy when he was seeing columns of Furies and a double sun and two cities of Thebes; or like Orestes, son of Agamemnon, driven in flight across the stage by his own mother armed with her torches and black snakes, while the avenging Furies sat at the door” (*Aen*. 4.469-73, of Dido hounded by Aeneas in dreams)

31) “Venus replied, 'I am sure that I deserve no such honour. Tyrians girls all carry the quiver and wear purple boot with this high ankle binding.” (*Aen*. 1.335-7: Venus wearing cothurnus, tragic buskin; goes on to give information, as in a tragic prologue)

Appendix: some Homeric parallels

Aen. 1.34-756	*Od.* 5.263-9, 586
Aen. 2-3	*Od*. 9-12 (esp. 9 Cyclops, 12 Scylla and Charybdis)
Aen. 1 and 4	largely unHomeric, but note Circe, Calypso, Nausicaa
Aen. 5	*Iliad* 23, *Od*. 8.86-380
Aen. 6	*Od*. 11 (but with much later input; e.g. Plato *Rep*.10)
Aen. 7 (Lavinia, catalogue)	*Iliad* 2-3 (Helen, catalogue)
(Juno's monologue)	*Od*. 5 (Poseidon)
Aen. 8 (Evander)	*Od*. 3.1-403 (Nestor)
(shield)	*Iliad* 18 (Achilles' shield)
Aen. 9 (metamorphosis of ships)	*Iliad* 15 (burning of ships)
(Iris to Turnus)	*Iliad*18.165 (Iris to Achilles)
(Nisus and Euryalus)	*Iliad* 10 (Dolon/raid)
Aen. 10	parts of *Iliad* 16, 19.21
(death of Pallas)	*Iliad* 16 (death of Patroclus)
Aen. 11 (Drances)	*Iliad* 2 (Thersites) and 18 (Polydamas)
(Arruns)	*Iliad* 16.783-17, 60 (Euphorbus)
Aen. 12 (duel; breaking of truce)	*Iliad* 3 and 4 (duel between Menelaus and Paris)
(Tolunius)	(Pandarus in Iliad 4)
(Aeneas wounded and healed)	*Iliad* 15.26-70
(farewell to Ascanius)	*Iliad* 6 (farewell to Andromache and Astyanax)
(pursuit and death of Turnus)	*Iliad* 22 (death of Hector)

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