

**From Republican Chaos to Imperial Cosmos:
Virgil's New Myth for Augustan Rome in the *Aeneid***

By Matt Wheeler

If Publius Vergilius Maro set out in 29 BCE to compose an epic in verse to celebrate Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, as he claims was his initial intent in his *Georgics* (3.47-50), the *Aeneid*, the nearly completed poem he left posterity when he died a decade later, presents a more complicated portrait of the great ruler and the vast continents-bestrident realm he had secured sole authority over. Indeed Octavian, the self-fashioned restorer of the Roman Republic, is lauded by Virgil and receives his apotheosis in this text, just as his Empire is given the destiny to rule the world by decree of Olympus and the Fates; but though Virgil's presentation of Octavian's Rome is unambiguously certain of its culmination as the pinnacle of human civilization, it is less certain—perhaps even troubled—over the means by which this cultural glory was achieved. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil combines themes of Homeric epic and Roman history to give audiences of the Augustan age, healing from decades of civil war and wary about the future of the Republic, a mythic center—a mythology—from which to relate to the socially and morally bewildering circumstances of the time, to fashion the chaos of a collapsed republic into the cosmos of an imperial state. Virgil, in essence, gives Octavian's Rome a new myth by which to live.

1. The Poet and the *Princeps*: Historical Context

During the ten years he composed the *Aeneid*, Virgil saw Rome transform into an imperial power, whose dominion spanned nearly the entire Mediterranean world, the frontiers of East Asia, Spain, Gaul, and Northern Africa. And Octavian alone enjoyed an autocratic rule over this immense realm, despite his taking every precaution to paint Rome as a republic and himself as a patriotic political representative of the people. Geographical circumstance and the patronage of affiliates within the Julian circle of course inevitably positioned Virgil squarely in the Octavian camp, and, as a result, his poetry rings with a certain pride in the Empire and lauds the achievements of the younger

Caesar. But the poet of the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics*, so attune to the pleasures and beauty of rustic life and eulogistic of the Republic's hardworking agrarian citizenry, surely must have had difficulty reconciling his sympathies for Octavian's political ambitions with the horrors his civil wars inflicted on the farmer-soldier population for which he felt such a strong affinity. Apart from being a masterpiece of epic literature that set a son of Rome among the Greek-dominated pantheon of canonical Western poets, the *Aeneid* seems to have been Virgil's recourse to working through the political-moral discrepancy that plagued his own psychology in this final decade of his life.

For the fifteen years in the wake of Caesar's assassination on the Ides of March 44 BCE, Octavian waded deeply and deliberately into a veritable bloodbath from which he would emerge alone as champion. This savage campaign would culminate in 30 BCE with the suicides of Antony and Cleopatra, Octavian's execution of Cleopatra and Caesar's son Caesarion, and the capture of Alexandria. But in a tactic out of step with the ruthless *modus operandi* that governed his antecedent dealings throughout the civil wars, though wholly congruent with the machinations of his ever-calculating genius, Octavian would spare the Alexandrians from the fate normally prescribed for traitors and rebels and embrace them as subjects of the Roman state. "When it was safe to pardon foreign people," Octavian would later say of this bestowal of clemency, "I preferred to preserve them rather than wipe them out" (qtd. in Arnold 364). But Octavian could afford to be lenient to his former enemies: he had no more rivals; the Roman realm was his, and so butchery was no longer needed. But those who lived through the civil wars knew better, and Virgil, ever the astute observer of the world as his poetry attests, was most certainly one of them, though his intimate proximity to Octavian and his loyalists surely obliged him to keep any of his qualms and dissents securely muzzled. But others would speak frankly about the blatant transparency of the quarter Octavian touted to have shown the Alexandrians, as Seneca did nearly a century later: "I am reluctant to call mercy what was really the exhaustion of cruelty" (qtd. in Arnold 364).

What to do about the transformation of Octavian, slayer of anti-Julian dissidents, to Augustus, healer of the shattered Republic? And what does such a figure as this supreme *princeps* mean for the future of Rome? Clearly, these were the questions playing on Virgil's mind as he set out in 29 BCE "to celebrate / the fiery fights of Caesar, make his name / live in the future for as many years / as stretch from old Tithonus down to Caesar" (3.47-50), as he declared in the *Georgics*, completed shortly after the suicides of Antony and Cleopatra. But Virgil, perhaps now comfortable in the mantle of a master of verse and thus aware of the profound influence his poetic genius wielded on audiences of the Augustan age, seems to have understood any authentic celebration of Octavian's triumphs and Rome's centuries-long rise to a superpower, one that fancied itself as a world-civilizing bastion of justice, needed to be tempered with an unadulterated depiction of the brutal foundation the Augustan Empire was built upon: conquest and butchery. Of course, Virgil would need to be subtle and discreet in this enterprise; and so, he turned to the ever-familiar world of myth and symbol to articulate a clearer picture of the Roman story and its most triumphant leader, Augustus. By joining the mythic past with the uncertain present in the *Aeneid*, Virgil gives the Empire a national epic and a new culture hero to identify with. This culture hero, however, is not intended to be some nationalistic icon, but a more ambivalent character. He at once embodies the most celebrated attributes of the ideal Roman, incarnates the entire rags-to-riches history and lore of the Roman state, as well as its world-domineering destiny; but there is a flipside to each of these images, and the dark concomitants of the imperial superpower Rome saw itself as are on full display in Aeneas, its mythic avatar: conqueror, invader, oppressor, aggressor.

2. War Be Thy Bride: Aeneas' *Amor Fati*

The proem near the start of Book 7 in the *Aeneid* includes a puzzling invocation to the goddess Erato, the Muse of love poetry:

Now come,
Erato—who were the kings, the tides and times, how stood
the old Latin state when that army of intruders

first beached their fleet on Italian shores?
 All that I will unfold, I will recall
 How the battle first began...
 And you, goddess, inspire your singer, come!
 I will tell of horrendous wars, tell of battle lines
 And prince fired with courage, driven to their deaths,
 Etruscan battalions, all Hesperia called to arms.
 A greater tide of events springs up before me now,
 I launch a greater labor. (7.39-49)

Horrendous wars? Battle lines? Hardly the stuff of love poetry. Erato seems an odd choice for Virgil to summon at this juncture in the epic since the second half is devoted to brutal warfare and unabashed invasion, for the unwavering juggernaut that is Aeneas' Olympus-sanctioned destiny is about to plow right over the people of Hesperia. Calliope, the Muse of epic poetry, would seem a more fitting deity to appeal to here considering the martial mythemes that knit together Virgil's account of the Trojan conquest of Italy, which are ever congruent with Homeric motifs found in the *Iliad*. Bernard Knox finds Erato "the natural choice" (19), however, since the series of battles that comprise books 9 through 12 are rooted in the contest between Aeneas and Turnus for the hand of Lavinia in marriage. Is this to be a love story then?

If so, the romance between Aeneas and Lavinia is left untouched entirely by Virgil, for the poem ends in an image of stark brutality with the slaying of Turnus. Whatever conjugal relationship can be expected of the Latin princess and Aeneas must occur only after the Trojans' triumph over the Rutulians and their allies, since there is no exchange at any point between the two in the text. All that can be surmised about the Aeneas-Lavinia marriage is that it produces a son, Silvius, the future king of Alba Longa, whose birth is foretold by Anchises in Book 6. Though the prophecies told by Anchises in the Underworld and the stipulations Juno enumerates to Jupiter in return for relenting in her incessant harassment of Aeneas in Book 12 (950-961) indeed make it clear that Aeneas and Lavinia will be married, thereby uniting the Trojans and the various Italian kingdoms into a single people, Virgil—if he is any true poet, which he most certainly is—could not have had any hope for the human elements of this courtship. The marriage would in effect be a measure of diplomacy, a

nation-binding compact: fecund in its political and civic issue, wholly sterile in human warmth, affection, and love. Just consider the litany of horrors Aeneas has brought to Lavinia by the *Aeneid*'s end in his uncompromising determination to fulfill his promised destiny: the infusion of political and social upheaval in the realm of her father, Latinus; the wholesale massacre of Hesperian peoples by Trojan arms, as well as Etruscan and Arcadian blades; the thwarting of her arranged marriage; the murder of Turnus, her betrothed; the provoking of her mother Amata's suicide; the usurping of her father's throne as king of Italy. No, these are not offenses so easily relinquished. But that is no matter, for Lavinia could only be—was always intended to be—an instrument in the unfolding of Aeneas' destiny, which is of course also Rome's destiny.

But has not the mythic past of the *Aeneid* repeated itself in 30 BCE? Octavian, “son” of a slaughtered dictator, had to scheme and murder his way to the name Augustus, a title earned at the cost of substantial Roman blood, colossal martial efforts, and rampant civil strife. Thematically, the story of Octavian is the story of Aeneas: orphans of a fallen dynasty who had to spurn human indulgences—like love (Dido), mercy (Turnus)—in order to serve the destinies they believed were intended for them. For Aeneas, for Octavian, the gates of fate could only be opened by the slash of a sword.

So the invocation of Erato to tell a story of invasion and conquest is appropriate then in the preamble to Book 7. Virgil is going to sing a love story after all, but it is an *amor fati* romance, not a dalliance between two humans. *Prima reuocabo exordia pugnae* (7.40), writes Virgil: “I will recall / how the *battle* first began...” (emphasis added) (7.42-43). As he arrives at the mouth of the Tiber, Aeneas is about to meet his fated paramour: war. And it is war, after all, war and the high-stakes game of conquest, that is to be Rome's inescapable destiny, a destiny that begins with Aeneas, its founder, and culminates with Augustus, its apogee—or so Virgil certainly hoped.

3. Roman, Know Thy Myth: Underworld Revelations

Aeneas' initial landfall on Italy is at Cumae, where he is escorted into the land of the dead under the guidance of the Sybil. Here, in the Underworld, he will be temporarily reunited in the paradise of Elysium with the shade of his deceased father, who will disclose to Aeneas the future history of the Roman Empire whose foundations he will lay with his conquest of Latium. Anchises does so by orchestrating a dreamlike pageant for his son in which a succession of famous Romans pass before Aeneas, from Ascanius to Augustus, each presented in a scene or countenance that epitomizes his contribution to the Roman state. The parade of heroes and leaders is intended to be educative and inspirational to Aeneas, to impress upon him the impact that his mission to Italy will have on the world and its future generations; but it is a future only possible if Aeneas fulfills the destiny the Fates have unspooled for him. Once the scenes in the pageant come to an end and Anchises has sufficiently "fired [Aeneas'] soul with a love of glory still to come" (6.1023-1024), he prepares his son for the hard tasks that lie ahead in Latium:

[Anchises] tells him next of the wars Aeneas still must wage,
 he tells of Laurentine peoples, tells of Latinus' city,
 and how he should shun or shoulder each ordeal
 that he must meet. (6.1025-1028)

The path of destiny is now set before Aeneas, it is his to seize, but the route he takes to access it is a peculiar one. To depart the Underworld, Anchises has the option of guiding Aeneas and the Sibyl through a gate of horn, which "true shades" exit by (6.1031), or through a gate of ivory, by which the "dead send false dreams up toward the sky" (6.1033). Interestingly, it is the latter portal through which Anchises has his son and the Sibyl exit.

Why Anchises sends Aeneas through the gate of ivory has long been a fascinating head-scratcher for classicists. Scholarship has spent much ink on making sense of Virgil's decision to have Aeneas exit through the threshold frequented only by false dreams, and each authority has his or her own opinion of which theories are the most "obvious" or "credible." Here, a theory will be put forth that serves the present study, and which is founded on Goold's suggestion that by having Aeneas

leave the Underworld by the gate of delusive dreams, “Virgil represents his vision of Rome’s destiny as a dream which [Aeneas] is not to remember on his return to the real world” (qtd. in Knox 32).

Through the gate of ivory lies oblivion, the state of being forgotten. It would not make sense, then, that Anchises would send his son through the ivory gate if he intended for Aeneas to remember what his conquest of Italy will bring about. It would negate the purpose of showing Aeneas the whole pageant of Rome’s future leaders and making the trip to the Underworld altogether. It is as if Anchises *wants* Aeneas to forget all that he has seen. It is, thus, interesting to note that at no point beyond Book 6 does Aeneas make any mention of his experience in the Underworld. Has he indeed forgotten all that he saw? In the end, Anchises’ prophetic pageant is ultimately rather superfluous, since Venus and Jupiter are there throughout Aeneas’ quest to remind the Trojan hero of his destiny. But perhaps it is not Anchises’ intentions that should be questioned here, but those of his architect, Virgil.

There is only one viable reason why Virgil would choose to have Aeneas exit through the ivory gate: Aeneas is *meant* to forget what his father has told him. Then why is Book 6 necessary at all? The motive is pure plot contrivance, which is normally a telltale sign of poor writing, but here it singularly serves the theme that Virgil has been developing all along: that myth offers a world-orienting principle for a people that makes a cosmos out of an otherwise chaos. Aeneas is of course the fountainhead of post-republican Roman mythology. To use the language of Heidegger’s philosophy of phenomenology, the world of imperial Rome gathers around Aeneas; his myth plants a cosmos-ordering meridian in Italian soil, an *axis mundi*, quite specifically at Evander’s city of Pallenteum, the prefiguration of Rome itself. Aeneas, however, a wandering refugee in seek of a new home, cannot possibly foresee the impact his landfall in Hesperia will have on the world. This is arguably the purpose of Anchises’ pageant in the Underworld, to disclose to Aeneas what his new royal house will look like. But it was never Virgil’s intention for Aeneas to recall all that he saw in the Underworld; the pageant was staged for his contemporary readership, Romans living under the

reign of Augustus, ambivalent about the younger Caesar's political ambitions and wary of the future of the Roman state. Virgil is giving Rome a myth to live by, and it is Anchises who provides the precious conscience the war-torn Rome of the late 20s so desperately needed:

“But you, Roman, remember, rule with all your power
The peoples of the earth—these will be your arts:
To put your stamp on the works and ways of peace,
To spare the defeated, break the proud in war.” (6.981-984)

But, as previously noted, Aeneas' departure through the ivory gate indicates that he will have no recollection of Anchises' pageant. This underscores the importance of knowing what the myth is that one lives in. Aeneas is left, unlike Virgil's readership, myth-less. He has no myth to orient himself, inform his self-conception, sway his perception of the world. But, in truth, Aeneas' failure to remember the parade of noble descendants that will sprout from his line is inconsequential next to losing the memory of the solemn advice his father gives him that he blatantly disobeys in the poem's conclusion.

This crucial advice is offered when the shade of Julius Caesar appears during the pageant of Roman heroes and leaders, to whom Anchises says:

“No, my sons, never inure
yourselves to civil war, never turn your sturdy power
against your country's heart. You, Caesar, you
be first in mercy—you trace your line from Olympus—
born of my blood, throw down your weapons now!” (6.887-891)

Explicitly, Virgil here is protesting through Anchises the appalling violence and social upheaval engendered by the civil wars that followed Caesar's doom-bringing crossing of the Rubicon in 49 BCE, whose protracted strife Octavian would inherit and from which he would ultimately emerge supreme in the two decades following his uncle's assassination in the Senate. But Anchises' admonishment is meant to echo beyond this scene in the Underworld pageant as a warning to any Roman, any Caesar, faced with the prospect of war and conquest, tasked with the burden of ruling the great Roman nation. “No, *my sons*,” (emphasis added) he says. Anchises is speaking to his

descendants here. Implicit in this reprimand is stern advice to Aeneas, and, by extension, Octavian, the latter of whom Virgil extols as the “Son of a god, [who] will bring back the Age of Gold” (6.915) and whom Ovid will dub *pater orbis*, “father of the world,” in his *Fasti* (2.130). Mercy, then, is a fundamental Roman virtue, a cornerstone principle in the mythology of the Roman state, a quality that sets a civilized and enlightened people apart from and above the barbarous rabble it intends to improve through conquest and acculturation. It is the Romans’ gift to the world, and the natural threshold to peace and order.

But mercy is not the Roman attribute on display in the second half of the *Aeneid*. In fact, Virgil ends his epic with a bleak scene of savagery and aggression. After delivering a devastating wound to Turnus with a spear, Aeneas stands over his vanquished foe and prepares to deliver a deathblow. Turnus accepts defeat but makes a final appeal to Aeneas to spare his life:

“[...] if
 some care for a parent’s grief can touch you still,
 I pray you—you had such a father, in old Anchises—
 pity Daunus in his old age and send me back
 to my own people [...]
 Lavinia is your bride.
 Go no further down the road of hatred.” (12.1085-1093)

Aeneas holds his sword arm back for a moment, moved to relent. But then his eyes fall upon the sword-belt wrapped around Turnus’ shoulder, the sword-belt the Rutulian hero stripped from the corpse of Pallas—Pallas, the Arcadian prince brutally slain by Turnus, the beautiful son of King Evander so beloved by Aeneas. The bitter memory of Pallas’ death overwhelms him and the passion of vengeance gets the better of Aeneas. And the son of noble Anchises, progeny of Venus, goddess of love, plunges his sword into the heart of Turnus, burying it to the hilt in Latin blood. Here, in the chilling silence that Virgil leaves us with forever, starkly ornamented with primal images of unbridled rage and gruesome death, the solemn words of Anchises echo up from the Underworld: ““You, [Aeneas], *you be first in mercy*—you trace your line from Olympus—born of my blood, throw down your weapons now!”” (emphasis added) (6.889-891).

4. The Burden Of Greatness: The Demigod's Curse

By having Turnus plead for his life to Aeneas in the final scene of the epic, Virgil is alluding to a powerful episode from another epic of conquest, the *Iliad*. In Book 22, when Achilles, demigod-champion of the Achaean armies, has delivered a mortal wound to Hector, Troy's greatest and bravest warrior, before the Scaean Gates, Hector begs Achilles to return his corpse to his family so it may be burned with fitting rites. But Achilles, in a cruelty appalling even to the sensibilities of the normally unsympathetic Olympians, rejects Hector's request and proceeds to ravage the Trojan prince's carcass for a period of days, dragging the naked cadaver through the dust and letting dogs feast upon it. But even Hector's death cannot placate Achilles, for it must be ritualistically reenacted for days and nights, the flames of his rage only fanned by this maddened indulgence. Achilles has disappeared into himself, and all the world is to be dragged into his monomaniacal anguish and suffer there with him. Though Aeneas is not so diabolical in his punishment of Turnus, his own monomaniacal obsession with the fate prescribed to him by Jupiter has inflated his sense of self-importance to the point that he will stop at nothing to fulfill his destiny.

But Homer grants his Myrmidon hero an opportunity for redemption. And it is essential that he does so, for without such a cathartic final act the *Iliad* would likely not have survived the test of time the way it has for several millennia, continuously captivating generations of audiences in ever-changing historical contexts. The immensely touching meeting between Priam and Achilles in the poem's final book sees the once implacable Myrmidon warrior, whose pride thus far has been as indomitable as his martial prowess, relent in his anger at Hector over the death of Patroclus, and agree to return Hector's corpse to his family for a proper burial. Priam is able to crack the previously unbreakable shell of Achilles' rage by modeling forgiveness and humility to him—he is, after all, the father who kissed the hand of his son's murderer. Priam asks Achilles to think of his own father Peleus back in Phthia, and imagine how he will react when he hears that his own son has died at Troy, for die Achilles shall, that much now is certain. Priam, in essence, is asking Achilles to consider

someone else's grief, to imagine the experience of an Other, to sympathize. And through the thought of his poor father destined to mourn the death of his son does it become possible for Achilles to see Priam's suffering. Achilles here is in a sense rejoining the world of humanity by way of compassion and pity. Though Homer's epic begins on the eve of battle and ends with battle looming once again in twelve days time, and though nothing truly has changed in the grand scheme of the Trojan-Achaean conflict during the narrative, the *Iliad*'s primary protagonist does indeed experience a remarkable and moving transformation: Homer begins with the rage of Achilles and concludes with the pity of Achilles.

Virgil, however, offers no such poignant moment of reconciliation between enemies in his epic. And that is precisely the point: Aeneas has forgotten the words of his father—"be first in mercy"—and so has lost his myth, his soul. Aeneas, obsessed with his destiny, is naught but an automaton, a thrall of Jupiter in the second half of the epic. Without compassion, pity, or mercy, the virtues that redeem Achilles in the last act of the *Iliad*, Aeneas cannot experience the soul-saving return to human-ness that Homer's protagonist undergoes.

Aeneas, like Achilles, is a demigod. And like Achilles, a significant challenge Aeneas faces is managing his divine and mortal halves. This special genealogy exalts the demigod in the eyes of other mortals and ever places him or her in the spotlight of Olympus, fated to be the lover, scapegoat, pawn, or champion of particular immortals. It is the attentiveness of the latter group of spectators, the gods, that so often complicates the life of a demigod. This is the case with both Achilles and Aeneas, whose mortal instincts and aspirations must submit to the fate their divine blood demands of them. In their respective myths, both warriors become monomaniacally fixated on their divine attributes. For Achilles, it is public recognition for his greatness as a warrior, which was deferred if not denied to him by the intervention of Athena during the quarrel with Agamemnon in Book 1 of the *Iliad*. For Aeneas, it is his destiny as the Chosen One, the man who will found Rome. Obsession with these

divine attributes draws these demigod-heroes further from their human-ness and so complicates, at times destroys, their relationships with other mortals.

The inevitable outcome of demigods fixating on some aspect of their divine nature is a withdrawal from or rejection of the human world. These circumstances are often pointed out to the hero, usually quite harshly, by other mortals in both Homer and Virgil. Here is Patroclus in the *Iliad* infuriated with Achilles for sulking in his tent while fellow Achaeans are being slaughtered by Hector and the Trojans:

“You heart of iron! He was not your father,
the horseman Peleus—Thetis was not your mother.
Never. The salt gray sunless ocean gave you birth
and the towering blank rocks—your temper’s so relentless.” (16.37-40)

And here is Dido, raging at Aeneas for deserting her in Carthage after opening her city to his shipwrecked Trojans and her heart to his love:

“No goddess was your mother!
No Dardanus sired your line, you traitor, liar, no,
Mount Caucasus fathered you on its flinty, rugged flanks
and the tigers of Hyrcania gave you their dugs to suck!” (4.456-459)

In each of these diatribes, the respective hero is being rebuked for his unconscionable inhumane-ness by denying him his natural heredity. Achilles is accused of being born of sea and stone; Aeneas, begot by a mountain and tigers. Though the vituperations here may be hyperbolic and histrionic, the sentiment is clear indeed and its implications are serious. For how could an audience see the wisdom, values, and deepest aspirations of their culture reflected in the likes of Achilles and Aeneas, culture heroes to the bone, during these moments of hardheartedness? Homer redeems Achilles from his self-absorbed prison of rage, however, by opening his ears to the counsel of Priam, which persuades Achilles to return the corpse of Hector to his family to receive its due funerary honors. Virgil, however, leaves Aeneas in his destiny-obsessed rampage, unyielding even when his triumph over Turnus is imminent. He does not *hear* his father’s advice.

But this is not the first time Aeneas has failed to learn the lessons taught by the past. Earlier in Book 1 of the *Aeneid*, while walking around the newly built temple of Juno in Carthage, Aeneas sees that the tableau adorning the sanctuary's walls contains scenes from the now world-famous Trojan War. His reaction upon seeing these images is the same as Odysseus' in Book 8 of the *Odyssey*, when he hears the bard Demodocus sing of famous episodes from the siege of Troy. Aeneas, like the Ithacan, is suddenly brought to tears, for these memories do not evoke pride or excitement; they awaken pain, *awful* pain, and the horrific memories of death, fear, sorrow, and slaughter inundate him. It should not be surprising, then, that Aeneas finds solace in the company of Dido. After seventeen punishing years that saw countless Trojans die on Greek spears, the mighty city of Priam sacked and plundered, the death of his wife, the death of his father, and far too many days roving the seas for some coast that will give his weary and long-suffering people a place to rest, the world has shown Aeneas little kindness. It is Dido that grants him that respite, however. But when Mercury arrives in Book 4, shortly after Aeneas and Dido consummate their marriage in a cave under heavy rainfall, Aeneas is delivered commands by Jupiter to leave the Libyan shores and make for Italy as his fate decrees. And so he leaves the peace and safety of Dido's city to sail off on a conquest that is, in essence, the same as the Achaean assault on Troy. He is repeating the very past that brought tears to his eyes in the temple of Juno! He is about to inflict on the Latins the same horrors the Greeks imposed on the Trojans. He has forgotten the myth!

The *Aeneid* divides quite neatly into two halves, each anchored in a theme resonant with Homeric epic: conquest and voyaging. Books 1 through 6 chronicle the Trojans' seafaring wanderings through the Mediterranean in the seven years following the fall of Troy, and so abound in characters and scenes that have their analog in the *Odyssey*. Books 7 through 12 focus exclusively on the Trojans' invasion of Italy, and so draw significantly on mythemes from the *Iliad*. The parallels between Virgil and Homer are pervasive and have been extensively studied, and so need not be rehashed here. What is pertinent to the present discussion, however, is Virgil's reversal of the

Homeric Trojan War narrative structure. He inverts the conquest-to-voyage-home chronology into that of voyage-from-home-to-conquest. Blindly following his destiny, forgetful of the lessons taught by Anchises in the Underworld, Aeneas is blinkered from the woes to be wrought by his military campaign in Italy. As if to underscore the colossal error in judgment that Aeneas is making here, Virgil provides a contrary attitude towards war-waging from another veteran of the Trojan War. The Argive hero Diomedes, who famously attacks Aphrodite and Apollo in Book 5 of the *Iliad* and fought with distinction against the Trojans, is asked by emissaries of Turnus to support the Latins in repelling the Trojan invaders. But Diomedes has learned his lesson from the Trojan War. “You happy, happy people, men of old Ausonia,” Diomedes says to Turnus’ emissaries,

“what drives you now
to shatter your blessed peace? What spurs you
to rouse the hells of war you’ve never known?
We who defiled the fields of Troy with swords—
[...] we all have borne unspeakable punishments, yes,
we’ve paid the price in full for all our crimes.
[...] Join hands in pacts of peace
while you still have the chance. Don’t join battle,
sword to sword. Be on your guard.” (11:302-354)

These are the words of a man who knows not only the hell of war, but the physical and psychological consequences that incessantly haunt its veterans, as demonstrated in the punishments Olympus dealt out to the Greeks during the postwar *nostoi*. There were no happy endings to the Trojan War, not even for the victors. How could there be one for the Italian wars sparked by the coming of Aeneas? No, Diomedes will not think of donning his armor again. But Aeneas? Destiny-blind, with thoughts focused solely on the future Jove has set before him, he forgets the ordeals he has lived through. Virgil is clear on this: our dreams of the future must be held in check by the nightmares of the past.

5. The *Aeneid*: A Candle in the Dark

Within a mythology are the history and destiny of a people, their wisdom and their wishes, in essence, their identity; and it is the culture hero of the epic that most effectively embodies the mythology of a people. The *Iliad* as an epic offers a myth to live by through the demigod Achilles for

a civilization coping with the realities of war. The *Odyssey* offers a myth in the *nostos* of Odysseus for a postwar culture seeking to restore order and rebuild society after a sustained period of fighting and bloodshed. For its part, the *Aeneid* finds its place in the canon of classical epic because its culture hero, Aeneas, invites Romans to do a good deal of soul-searching during a time of social and political upheaval, when the ebbing chaos of Octavian's Rome is giving way to the budding shoots of a nascent cosmos whose shape and prospects are still entirely uncertain. Through Aeneas, Virgil is posing a question to his audience. As masters of the world, how shall you rule? Pro-imperialist or republican loyalist, empire is your future now, Roman: to what end is this *Imperium Romanum* headed?

Aeneas' forsaking of Dido is much more important than merely establishing a mythic basis for the havoc the Carthaginian forces of Hannibal wrecked upon Rome towards the end of the third century BCE. Dido, a wandering "orphan" like Aeneas, embodies quintessentially Roman virtues. It is no surprise that Aeneas falls in love with her, for she is everything he aspired to be: "She is a brave and fearless leader (*virtus*); she is dedicated to the welfare of her people to the point of self-sacrifice and she is a devout worshiper of the gods (*pietas*); she is a fair lawgiver (*iustitia*); she has worked unceasingly for establishing her nation in a hostile land (*industria*)" (Galinsky 348). Are these the virtues that should be rejected to pursue an ambition for world power? What would the noble Anchises think of the means by which his son fulfilled his god-decreed destiny? One could argue Octavian divorced his "Dido" and forsook the advice of his "Anchises" in order to pursue his destiny as Augustus, and that future was bought at a devastating price in blood and carnage. There is the personal myth and the collective myth. As to whether the one can be harmonized with the other, that is Virgil's final challenge to his reader.

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