



FROM TROY TO ROME: THE WORLD OF THE HERO IN VIRGIL'S AENEID

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A note on the translation

A note on the text: the translation used in this presentation is by Robert Fagles for Penguin Classics. It is modern and vibrant and I hope you enjoy it!

To create this free flow feel, and unlike other translations who try to adapt themselves so they are closer to the original line numberings, the lines in Fagles' translation do not follow closely the lines in the original. So in order to make things easier for any of you who wish to look the text up in other translations or in the Latin text itself, I have given you the original text lines in the parenthesis.

Before Virgil...

Aeneas was only a minor figure in the Greek epic narratives

- ✓ Aeneas mentioned in:
 - ✓ *Iliad* 20.307-8
 - ✓ 'And now the might of Aeneas shall be lord over the Trojans and his sons' sons, and those who are born of their seed hereafter.'
 - ✓ Hymn to Aphrodite 196-8
 - ✓ 'You will have a son of your own, who amongst the Trojans will rule, and children descended from him will never lack children themselves. His name will be Aeneas...'

Aeneas: the Roman Achilles?

- A figure more complicated than Achilles, carrying Homeric, Hellenistic and Roman traits.

- ❖ Aeneas = mythical and historical
- ❖ Homeric hero (fight)
 - ❖ 'So let's die, let's rush to the thick of the fighting.' (*Aeneid* 2)
- ❖ Hellenistic hero (emotion)
 - ❖ 'And I couldn't believe I was bringing grief so intense, so painful to you.' (Aeneas to Dido in *Aeneid* 6)
- ❖ Roman hero (leadership)
 - ❖ 'You, who are Roman, recall how to govern mankind with your power.' (*Aeneid* 6)

Book 1 The temple of Juno

- **Aeneas now looking at 'his' war from 'the outside': a sign that he is abandoning his Homeric traits behind?**

- ❖ The strange sight of an 'old' and famous war:

'Here in this grove, a strange sight met his eyes and calmed his fears for the first time. ... Awaiting the queen, beneath the great temple exploring its features one by one, amazed at it all, the city's splendor, the work of rival workers hands.' (1.450-56)

- ❖ The events all laid out in order on the walls:

'... all at once he sees: from first to last, he whole series of battles at Troy represented, wars that were already famed world-wide in rumour and story.' (1.456-7)

Reading after Homer: What did Aeneas see?

- **The dark side of the war at Troy.**

- ❖ Victims are hunters and vice versa: ' Here Greeks in flight, routed by Troy's young ranks, there Trojans routed by plumed Achilles in his chariot.' (1. 466-8)
- ❖ Butchery: "'Rhesus' men betrayed in their slumber, hideously butchered by Tydeus' blood drenched son, Diomedes.'" (1.471)
- ❖ War wasteful of youth: ' Elsewhere, Aeneas sees Troilus in flight, his weapons flung aside', unlucky boy, no match for Achilles onslaught.' (1. 474-6)
- ❖ Pointless supplication: 'And here, the Trojan women, are moving toward the temple of Pallas ... but Pallas turns away.' (1.479-82)

Leaving Troy behind; the view from outside

- **Aeneas removed from Troy, emotionally as well as physically: does not understand the depictions on Juno's temple.**

- ✓ Aeneas gets it wrong:
 - ✓ 'Oh Achates, is there anywhere, any place on earth not filled with our ordeals? ... Dismiss your fears. Trust me, this fame of ours will offers us heaven.' (1.459-63)
- ✓ Spellbound by his own war
 - ✓ Murals haunt and bewilder Aeneas
 - ✓ 'While he stands stock-still, eyes fixed, gaze totally focused.' (1.495)
- ✓ Seeing his Trojan self from the outside
 - ✓ He even sees himself swept up in the melee, clashing with Greek captains. (1. 488)

Leaving Troy Behind: Deviant Focalisation

- **This is a narrative 'from a distance' that chooses what to show and what to ignore: Virgil pushing Aeneas (and the readers) to notice the disaster that was the Trojan war?**

- Troy at/from a distance
 - We follow Aeneas' gaze, assessing Troy
- Empathy (or unreliability of view?)
 - 'Groaning a great deal, bedewing his face with a river of weeping' (1.465)
- Selective Aeneas – manipulative Virgil?
 - Images on the temple tell the whole war, in order (*ex ordine*)
 - Aeneas, though, chooses random sequences: e.g. 'Here, selling Hector's lifeless cadaver for gold, was Achilles.' (1.483)

Hector's advice

- **Archaic code of honour and heroism rejected.**

- Book 2: 268-98
 - Aeneas dreams of Hector
- Hector's physical appearance is shocking
 - "Nearby, deeply depressed, flooding tears in a copious torrent, blackened with gore-clotted dust.' (2.271-272)
- War wounds are traditionally a badge of honour: not here.
 - 'Now he wore only the numerous wounds he'd received round his homeland's walls.' (2.278)

A new epic code

- **Homeric heroism dies with Priam. Aeneas needs (to embrace) a new mission but he lacks training and commitment.**

- ✓ Old heroism is bankrupt
 - ✓ 'Once he'd spoken, the elderly man [Priam] made a feeble strike with a powerless spear.' (2.544-545)
- ✓ Aeneas: at best, a reluctant hero
 - ✓ Easily distracted – e.g. by Carthage's civilisation 'Aeneas marvels at its mass – once a cluster of huts – admires the gates, bustling hum and cobbled streets. The Tyrians press on Drafting laws, electing judges...' (1. 421-6)
 - ✓ Lacking direction: 'whatever lands may call me to their shores' (1.610)

Book 3: Lost in-between two worlds

◦ **The journey towards Rome and a Roman epic a tortuous one: Narrative and characters slow to turn away from Troy.**

- Second (and last) book of the retrospective narration
- Aeneas cannot find the place to found a new Troy
 - Seven years of journeying
- Surprisingly light-hearted fantasy story
 - But Andromache episode creates pathos and Homeric nostalgia
- Her husband Helenus re-directs them back to a future Rome with his prophesies.

An encounter with Achaemenides

- **A relic from the past, Achaemenides, from Odysseus' old crew, encapsulates the rejection of the Homeric epic code: a world, and a set of beliefs, no longer adequate to guide a hero and a leader through the new, Roman, challenge.**

- Abandoned by Odysseus
 - ❖ 'He's in all else Greek, once sent against Troy in his father's inherited armour.' (3.594-595)
- Achaemenides and Homeric epic: both a relic of the past.
 - ❖ 'Suddenly, out of the forest, a figure appears, unlike any we've ever seen, starved gaunt, quite pitifully squalid – an unknown man coming down to shore...' (3.591-592)
- Blurring of real and imagined images: Troy now belongs to the world of fantasy.
 - ❖ 'All through the cave, as he vomited up, in his sleep, half-digested chunks, gore clots, all blended with blood thick, previously unmixed wine...' (3.631-3)

The stop at Buthrotum

- **A pivotal encounter at Buthrotum: challenged by the past and offered the future, Aeneas sets off on the final leg of his mission.**

- ✓ Andromache and Helenus have founded a new city
 - ✓ 'Drawing in close to the lofty heights of a city: Buthrotum.' (3.293)
- ✓ But Andromache is still in the Homeric past
 - ✓ 'She held rites of remembrance, with food for the dead, sad gifts, and libations, calling on Hector's empty tomb.' (3.303-4)
- ✓ Helenus is much more forward and Roman looking
 - ✓ 'Son of the goddess: that you're being guided and watched by some major powers as you travel the deep is quite obviously true.' (3.373-4)

Games at Book 5: from Troy to Rome

- **A 'playful' transition; from Homer's muscular bodies, cruel young competitors, derision of the elderly and the infirm to Roman values: gifts for participation, consolation prizes, respect for the old and for justice: *pater Aeneas* emerges**

- ✓ Sicilian Games in honour of Anchises: a Homeric set piece for Roman times.
- ✓ Homeric monster ships (Dragon, Chimaera, Centaur, Scylla) BUT captains' named after later Roman families (Mnestheus, Memnian, Gyas, Sergestus, Cloanthus).
- ✓ Consideration for the fallen: 'But I am allowed to show my regret over an innocent friend's downfall.' (Aeneas offering a price to Salius, 5. 350)
- ✓ A potent marvel: the comet that appeared during Octavian's games in honour of Caesar.
'Flying up to the swirling clouds [Acestes'] arrow shot into flames ... lost like the shooting stars that often break loose, trailing a mane of flames to sweep across the sky.' (5. 523-8)

Still at the Games: ugly heroics

- **A spectre from Troy: arrogant, disrespectful youth; oppressed and derided old age; cruelty in the face of suffering.**

'Father-Son' relationships do not always work:

'Young Gyas blazed in indignation deep to his bones, tears streamed down to his cheeks, he flings to the winds all care for self-respect and the safety of his crew and pitches the sluggish Menoetes off the stern, headlong into the sea and takes the helm himself. His own pilot now, he spurs his oarsmen, turning the rudder hard to port and heads for home. Old Menoetes, dead weight in his sodden clothes, struggling up at last from the depths to break the surface, clambered onto the rock and perched there high and dry. The Trojan crews had laughed when he took the plunge, then when he floundered round and now they laugh as he retches spews of brine from his heaving chest.' (5. 169-82)

Book 8 The shield of Aeneas: Looking forward to Rome

A step change in the journey away from Troy. A Roman hero is rising: |Aeneas (and/or Augustus?)

- ✓ Recalls the Homeric parallel...
 - ✓ Thetis giving the shield to Achilles in Iliad Book 18.
- ✓ ... But tells the story of Rome's history...
 - ✓ Yet another prophecy marker
 - ✓ Does not shy away from dark episodes
 - ✓ Pities Roman against Italian
- ✓ ... And highlights the imperial expansion of the Roman Empire.
 - ✓ Battle of Actium dominates the shield

Book 8: the emperor and the monster

- **There is the best epic hero: a Roman emperor, elevated and terrifying in equal measure.**

- ✓ So Cacus, caught in that stunning flood of light, shut off in his hollow rock, ... Hercules overwhelms him from high above... A deathtrap, no way out for the monster now! Cacus retches up from his throat dense fumes, endless darkness mixed with fire billowing through his lair.' (8. 247-53)
- ✓ 'And here in the heart of the shield'; the battle of Actium ... Caesar Augustus leading Italy into battle ... High astern he stands, the twin flames shoot forth from his lustrous brows and rising from the peak of his head.' (8. 675-81)

Book 10: the endgame starts; hero (- emperor - monster)

**United in joyful
luminescence,
Aeneas (and
Augustus) look
back at a
threatening
Achilles (and a
fuming Cacus): the
spectre of fury
unleashed only a
step away ...**

‘Now Aeneas, standing high astern, no sooner catches a glimpse of his own Trojan camp than he quickly hoists his burnished, brazen shield in his left hand. The Trojans up on the ramparts shout to the skies ... From the peak of Aeneas’ helmet flames are leaping forth and a deadly blaze comes pouring from its chest.’ (10. 260-71)

‘Old Priam was first to see him, racing over the plain, his bronze breastplate gleaming like Sirius, the star of harvest, brightest of stars in the dark of night. The old man groaned aloud, and raising his arms, beat his head with his hands, shouting entreaties to his dear son, who stood before the Gate, ready to turn his fury on Achilles.’ (*Iliad* 22)

Aeneas: The Roman Achilles

- ❖ **Virgil Romanises epic narrative.**
- ❖ **A new kind of epic hero: a Roman leader is needed.**
- ❖ **Aeneid and Aeneas: examples of this long, difficult transition.**
- ❖ **Aeneas abandons his own past and struggles to believe in, and build, the future.**
- ❖ **(Roman) Pity and (Trojan) fury vie for Aeneas' soul to the end.**
- ❖ **Where does Augustus sit in all this? Powerful and disturbing links created between the Founder and the Emperor, lingering in the mind to the bitter end.**

Food for (further) thought...

For any of you that may want to pursue some of these broad issues further, I append here, as I draw to a close, a couple of teaching focused books on the Aeneid – I trust you find something of interest in them to set you thinking on!

William Anderson and Lorina Quartarone (eds), *Approaches to Teaching Vergil's Aeneid*, Modern Languages Association of America: New York, 2002.

Christine Perkell, *Reading Vergil's Aeneid. An Interpretative Guide*, University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1999.

David Ross, *Virgil's Aeneid. A Reader's Guide*, Blackwell Publishing: Oxford, 2007.