Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: Intertextual Keys to Aeneid 6

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And be these juggling fiends no more believed
That palter to us in a double sense;
That keep the word of promise to our ear
But never to our hope.

(Shakespeare, Macbeth 5.8.19–22)

When Odysseus is told by Circe in Book 10 of the Odyssey that he must journey to the realm of the dead, he is devastated:

And be these juggling fiends no more believed
That palter to us in a double sense;
That keep the word of promise to our ear
But never to our hope.

When Aeneas is given the same instruction by the dream–image of his father Anchises towards the end of Aeneid 5, however, we find a very different response. The only anguish he displays is at the fact that his father’s image recedes from his consciousness; the instruction he proceeds to follow eagerly and without question. The man of pietas can do no other; as soon as he lands at Cumae he seeks out the sibyl and, after dutifully following Helenus’ instruction to consult her about the future (see 3.441–60), he delivers a speech whose purpose is to persuade her to enable him to descend into the underworld (6.106–23). The cardinal virtue which drives him forward is recognised by Anchises when they finally meet in the closing section of the book: uicit iter durum pietas (‘pietas has overcome the difficult journey’, 6.689).

In this, the climax of the Odyssean half of the Aeneid, Virgil follows his normal technique of setting up a complex of intertextual relationships, the most immediately obvious being with the Nekyia of Homer’s Odyssey; as Boyle points out in his essay on the Aeneid in the Routledge Roman Epic, the allusion is constant.1 And the particular set of circumstances outlined above represents a good initial example of Virgil’s use of intertextuality. In both the Odyssey and the Aeneid, the instruction to visit the realm of the dead comes when the hero seems to have lost his way: Odysseus has spent a year enjoying the pleasant company of Circe and has to be reminded by his crew that they ought to be thinking of getting home (Od. 10.472–4), while Aeneas has been in an agony of indecision about what to do in the face of the obvious disinclination of a significant number of his followers to continue travelling in search of a home (see esp. Aen. 5.700–04 and 719–20). In both cases the indecision has already been resolved (Odysseus has accepted the advice of his men and determined to resume his voyage, and Aeneas has been told by the dream–image of Anchises to accept Nautes’ advice); in both cases the instruction to make the journey to Hades’ comes right out of the blue; in both cases the purpose of this journey is to consult the shade of a particular individual about the future; and in both cases the instruction is given towards the end of the book prior to that in which the actual journey is narrated.

1 Boyle (1993), 94–98.
And prior to embarking on this journey a death occurs which will find a resonance in the journey itself: that of Elpenor in the *Odyssey* and that of Palinurus in the *Aeneid*.

Setting up these structural, narrative and thematic parallels of course serves to throw the differences into sharp relief and thus engage the reader’s attention. I have already mentioned how Aeneas’ *pietas* is emphasised by the different way in which he and Odysseus respond to the necessity of their journey; but there is another revealing character distinction highlighted here. Odysseus has himself made the decision to resume his voyage home as *Od.* 10.475 makes clear; it is he who requests Circe to allow him and his crew to depart, and it is in response to this that Circe announces that he must first make his voyage to the land of the dead. The anguish he displays is that of a man who sees this (understandably) as an appallingly frustrating interruption to the course of action he has decided upon. In the case of Aeneas, however, the instruction comes as the second of a pair delivered by Anchises with the endorsement of Jupiter (5.726f.); it relieves him of the task which he had been finding too much for him, that of having to think and make decisions for himself. It is as if he has opened another of the sealed envelopes that form his mission statement; he has no lack of courage in carrying out the instructions therein contained and proceeds unhesitatingly and single-mindedly so to do.² So we have on the one hand Odysseus *πολύτροπος* devisor and implementer of stratagems; and on the other, Aeneas *pius*, the man who does what others tell him is his duty.

This crucial difference between Aeneas and Odysseus is highlighted also in the Elpenor / Palinurus parallel. It is of course significant that whereas Odysseus is unaware of Elpenor’s death until he encounters his shade in the land of the dead (see esp. *Od.* 11.55–58), Aeneas already thinks he knows about the fate of Palinorus and is therefore not surprised in the same way as Odysseus is when he meets him on the banks of the Styx. The issue for Aeneas is the fulfilment of prophecy and the trustworthiness of Apollo’s oracle (6.341–46); Palinurus’ reply to Aeneas’ question *en haec promissa fides est?* (‘is this how he [i.e. Apollo] fulfils his promise?’) shows that both Aeneas and we are mistaken in thinking that Palinurus was drowned when he fell overboard at the end of Book 5, and thus in a technical sense the oracle that he would make it to Ausonia was fulfilled. That oracles can be fulfilled in this cruel and deceptive way (as Macbeth also discovered) should of course be a lesson to Aeneas (as to the reader) that oracles do not always mean what we expect them to mean—but that is another story. Here we should note the parallelism in the pleas made by Elpenor and Palinurus to their respective leaders to perform the appropriate funerary rites and the diametrically opposite response. Odysseus unhesitatingly promises to grant his dead comrade’s request in a simple one-line reply (*Od.* 11.80), and the funeral of Elpenor is the first task to occupy him on his return to Aiaia (12.8–15). In the case of Palinorus on the other hand it is the sibyl who steps in to reply. Ignoring his plea for burial and concentrating only on his second request that Aeneas should take him with him over the Styx, the sibyl roundly attacks him for his presumption, concluding this part of her reply with the chilling words *desine fata deum flecti sperare precando* (‘cease hoping that the fates decreed by the gods are swerved by prayer’, 6.376). To Palinorus as to Misenus is offered the spurious compensation of the *aeternum nomen* in a local placename (381), a grotesque parody of the *τύμβος* and *στήλη* that mark the site of Elpenor’s funeral, and one which gives joy not to the dead but to the land (*gaudet cognomine terra*, ‘the land rejoices in its name’, 383).³ Palinurus was an

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² Cf. Bishop (1988), 104: ‘Gone are the anxieties, doubts and tensions: Aeneas is now the leader again and his behaviour is brisk and businesslike.’ See also Heinze (1914), 275.

³ The MSS read *gaudet cognomine terrae*; the reading given is that of Servius, as adopted by Austin (1977). In his note on the passage, Austin insists on taking *terra* as
expendable pawn, as the conclusion of Book 5 makes clear; to grant his request for burial now would impose an unacceptable delay on the mission. No room here for the obligation due to a dead comrade, and the sibyl steps in to ensure that any such feelings on Aeneas’ part will be suppressed. It is Misenus who gets the Elpenor treatment of mound, arms, oar and trumpet, because the sibyl perceives in him a pollution that affects the whole enterprise (totamque incestat funere classem, ‘and is polluting the entire fleet by his death’, 150). Odysseus is free to make his own decisions based on his own moral sensibility; Aeneas cannot be permitted such a luxury at this crucial stage.

Virgil thus commences his account of Aeneas’ journey through the underworld with an episode that carefully parallels Homer’s narrative structure; Palinurus is the first individual encountered by Aeneas just as Elpenor is the first encountered by Odysseus. Thereafter, however, their paths diverge. Indeed, one can hardly talk of a path followed by Odysseus, since he remains on the threshold waiting for the shades to come to him, whereas Aeneas actually travels through the realm of the dead to emerge finally in the Elysian fields. Furthermore, Virgil reverses the order of events to have Aeneas achieve the ostensible object of his journey at the end of it, whereas Odysseus gets the business part of his trip over with first. After he has consulted Teiresias, Odysseus becomes virtually a tourist, satisfying his intellectual curiosity by contemplating the shades of

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fact who is now living out the consequences of the choice he made at Carthage. The encounter with Dido earlier in Book 6, with its clear echoes of Odysseus’ encounter with Ajax in Odyssey II, tellingly underscores the distance between the two heroes.5 Odysseus frankly wishes he had never won the contest which led to Ajax’ suicide (ὡς δὴ μὴ ὄφελον νυκὰν τοῦ ἄνδρον ἐπ’ ἀέθλω, ‘would that I had not won in a contest of that kind’, Od. 11.548); all Aeneas can do is reiterate his claim of 4.361 that he was acting against his inclination (inuitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi, ‘it was against my will, O queen, that I left your shore’, Aen. 6.460).6 It is only Odysseus who when confronted with the consequences of his action proclaims that if he had his time over again he would act differently. Again, that is a luxury granted only to those whose lives are theirs to run.

As mentioned earlier, Virgil has deliberately and consciously (re)structured his narrative so that the prophetic passage comes as the climactic conclusion to the book. It is also obvious from even a superficial reading that the concluding section of Aeneid 6 is more ‘philosophical’ and more overtly ideological than what has gone before. What we find as we read Virgil’s text more closely is that he is establishing another set of intertextual relationships, where the net is widened to draw in allusions to philosophic myth: particularly to Plato’s ‘Myth of Er’ and to Cicero’s ‘Dream of Scipio’, both mythic conclusions to large-scale works of political philosophy. Structurally the prophecy of Anchises (and in this I include his account of cosmology at 6.724ff.) functions as a mythic underpinning of the ideology implied in the first half of the poem, the goal towards which the odyssean wanderings of Aeneid 1–6 have been directed; the parallel to the structure of Plato’s Politeia and Cicero’s De Re Publica is pointed and deliberate.

To take Plato first. The idea that we occupy a rational and moral universe in which virtue is rewarded and vice punished and the notion that souls have a pre-natal existence is central to both Socrates’ and Anchises’ world-view; the left-hand and right-hand paths for the wicked and just respectively occur at Rep. 614c and Aen. 6.540–43, and the thousand year journey during which souls experience the consequences of their actions in their previous incarnation is likewise common to both (Rep. 615a and Aen. 6.748). In both texts it is after the completion of this thousand–year cycle that souls assemble to be once again incarnated in a human body. But it is here that we encounter two crucial and fundamentally significant differences. In Plato, souls are identified from their previous incarnations as we read of the lives chosen by those who were once Orpheus, Thamyris, Ajax, Agamemnon, Odysseus and others, and they use the experience of their previous incarnation in making their choice. In the Aeneid on the other hand souls are identified from the lives they are about to live; there is no opportunity for the exercise of choice or for learning from experience—a fact emphasised by the other crucial divergence Virgil makes, which is to have souls drink the water of forgetfulness before they are allotted a life (6.749–51), not, as in Plato, after.8

5 For further discussion of the way in which this intertextual relationship determines our perception of Aeneas’ response to Dido here, see Johnson (1976), 82–84.

6 This line of course sets up its own intertextual relationship with Catullus 66.39, where Berenice’s lock states inuita, o regina, tuo de uertice cessi (‘it was against my will, o queen, that I left your head’). The irony generated by having Aeneas thus evoke the discharge of a woman’s vow on the safe return of her lover–husband (pro dulci coniuge, 33–Aen. 4.324) is poignant; certainly deserving of a more sensitive response than ‘Catullus wasted a splendid line; Virgil shows how it can be put to better use’ (Russell [1979], 13). See most recently Lyne (1994), 187–93.

7 A work whose traditional title is normally if misleadingly rendered in English as Republic, a Latin word which (as Cicero’s work itself shows) has significantly different connotations from the Greek πολιτεία (= ‘a socio–politico–legal system suitable for a πόλις’). I thus prefer to use the Greek title, although when abbreviating one is forced to use the Latin Rep. to avoid confusion with that other work of Plato’s whose title is not conventionally Latinised, the Politikos.

8 Cf. Camps (1969), 88f. Camps notes this reverse
Socrates’ myth turns on the vital importance of equipping ourselves with the capacity to make the right moral choices, which is a matter of being able to see the consequences of adopting one course of action rather than another. Anchises’ Romans have no such ability, a fact underscored by the futility of his appeal to the souls of Caesar and Pompey to refrain from civil war at 6.832–35. A moral system based on pietas and mos maiorum rather than insight into the true nature of things cannot in the end stand against the impulse towards personal aggrandisement and the pursuit of wealth and power; the choices made by the leading political figures of the last days of the Roman republic are those of the soul who chose the tyranny of Anchises.

In regna Lauini
Dardanidae uenient (mitte hanc de pectore curam),
sed non et uenisse uolent.

(Aeneid 6.84–6)

The descendants of Dardanus will come to the kingdom of Lavinium (cast this particular worry from your mind), but they will also wish that they had not come. They will get what they have chosen, but the consequences will show that theirs was not a to be reincarnated to bees at Aen. 6.706 ff., which invites reading in the light of Plato Phaedo 82b: ‘I suppose that the happiest people...are the ones who have cultivated the goodness of an ordinary citizen...which is acquired by habit and practice, without the help of philosophy and reason’—’How are these the happiest?’—’Because they will probably pass into some other kind of social and disciplined creature like bees, wasps, and ants...But no soul which has not practised philosophy, and is not absolutely pure when it leaves the body, may attain to the divine nature; that is only for the lover of learning.’ (Tr. Tredennick & Tarrant [1993], 141f.)

9 Normally rendered ‘Interpreter’ (Cornford, Rouse, Lee), although Jowett has ‘prophet’.

10 One might note here the comparison of souls about προφήτης, the sibyl, articulates for him the consequences of the life he has chosen, that he will recreate the Trojan War in Italy and that a second Achilles has already been born (alias Latio iam partus Achilles, 6.89), he is, and remains, unable to comprehend. As the poem moves through to the climax of its Iliadic half, we see the devouring of children in the fates of Nisus, Euryalus, Pallas, Lausus, and the alius Achilles is revealed by numerous unambiguous allusions to the Iliad as Aeneas himself. Those who choose wisely, said Socrates’ προφήτης, even if they are last in line will find a life that is ἀγαπητός, ‘desirable’ (Rep. 619b); for Aeneas and his companions on the other hand the sibyl has this to say:

And when the προφήτης had spoken, he who had the first choice came forward and in a moment chose the greatest tyranny; his mind having been darkened by folly and sensuality, he had not made any thorough inspection before he chose, and did not perceive that he was fated, among other evils, to devour his own children. But when he had time to examine the life, he beat his breast and lamented over his choice, forgetting the proclamation of the προφήτης for instead of blaming himself for his evils, he accused chance and the gods and everything rather than himself. Now he was one of those who came from heaven, and in a former life had dwelt in a well–ordered πολιτεία; his share of virtue derived from habit without philosophy.

Plato Rep. 619b–d (after Jowett)

11 Block (1980) notes the thematic significance of Virgil’s emphasis on the slaughter of the young and the way in which this is highlighted through a series of intertextual relationships with the Iliad; it is, however, the relationship with the myth of Er that allows us to lay moral responsibility for this slaughter directly on Aeneas’ choice of a life.

Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: Intertextual Keys to Aeneid 6

Roman heroes provides incitement to action:

> et dubitamus adhuc uirtutem extendere factis, 
> aut metus Ausonia prohibet consistere terra?  

_Aeneid_ 6.807f.

And do we still hesitate to expand our virtue by deeds, or does fear inhibit us from establishing ourselves on Ausonian soil?

What for Cicero are the _imagines_ of notable historical figures and the _optimus status_ of the republic are for Anchises the souls of those about to play their part in the establishment of the Roman state and Roman world–domination; in terms of their espousal of civic virtue, their ideological positions are indistinguishable.

In the ‘Dream of Scipio’ as in _Aeneid_ 6 the ideology is given a cosmic reference, and Virgil carefully sets up the parallels in his narration. The dream aspect is evoked by the appearance of Anchises to Aeneas at 5.726ff., by the comparison of Anchises’ _imago_ to a ‘fleeting dream’ at 6.702 (itself an echo of a twice–used simile from _Odyssey_ 11: 11.207 and 222), and by the Gates of Sleep of 6.893ff. (of which–naturally–more later). The otherworldly encounter between son and father recalls that between grandson and grandfather in the earlier work (the relationship in the _Aeneid_ being emphasised by the formulaic repetition of _pater Anchises_ [‘father Anchises’] at the same position in the line at 6.679, 713, 854, 867); and in both cases the _imago_ of the departed ancestor uses the opportunity to engage in prophecy, encouragement and cosmic revelation, and to answer questions. The parallelism extends even to details of cosmology: both Anchises and the elder Scipio represent the stars and planets as animated by divine mind (SS 15; _Aen_. 6.724–27) and fire as the element that predominates in the soul (SS 15; _Aen_. 6.730f.). And in both cases it is the happy place, the Elysian Fields in the _Aeneid_ or a fixed habitation in heaven in the ‘Dream of Scipio’, that is both the dwelling–place of the souls of the virtuous after death and the source of souls destined to play a major

Contemplation of the past is to provide a moral paradigm for present action, particularly with regard to those who occupied the position of ‘first man in Rome’, the _rector/ moderator/ princeps/ summus uir rei publicae._11 So too for Anchises the parade of _neque enim est ualla res, in qua propius ad deorum numen uirtus accedat humana, quam ciuitatis aut condere nouas aut conservare iam conditas._

_Cicero_ _DRP_ 1.7.12

For there is no other area in which human virtue more closely approaches the divinity of the gods than in the founding of new states or the preservation of those already founded.

13 On the links between the ‘Dream of Scipio’ and _Aeneid_ 6 see Hardie (1986), 71–76, though Hardie tends to talk in terms of ‘influence’ rather than ‘intertextuality’. Similarly Camps (1969), 89f., speaks of ‘reminiscence’ and ‘inherited materials’ without addressing the functional nature of Virgil’s divergence. Cf. also Habinek (1989), who deals at length with the _DRP_ (234f., 248–51) but likewise fails to appreciate how the intertextuality affects our response to the content of Virgil’s text. See also Klingner (1967), 491f.; Feeney (1986), lf.

14 On this figure and the ideology underpinning Cicero’s _DRP_ generally, see Penwill (1994), 70–76.
role on the Roman political stage in the future. So the elder Africanus:

sed quo sis, Africane, alacrior ad tutandum rem publicam, sic habeto: omnibus, qui patriam conservauerint, adiuuerint, auxerint, certum esse in caelo definitum locum, uti beati aevum sempiterno fruantur; nihil est enim illi principi deo, qui omnem mundum regit, quod quidem in terris fiat, acceptius quam concilia coetusque hominum iure sociati, quae ciuitates appellantur; harum rectores et conservatores hinc profecti huc reuertuntur.

SS 13 = Cicero DRP 6.13.13

But, Africanus, so that you may be the more eager to guard the res publica, carry this thought with you: that for all those who have saved, aided, expanded their fatherland there is an assigned place in heaven, where in blessedness they enjoy eternal life; for as far as what happens on earth is concerned, nothing is more acceptable to that princeps god who regulates the universe than the assemblies and gatherings of men bound together by justice which are called states; their regulators and preservers come from and return to this place.

And impressed (as who could not be) by the fact that the extracorporeal existence of these souls is far superior to that of souls imprisoned in bodies, that it is in fact true life as opposed to the ‘death’ that is life on earth, the younger Scipio asks the soul of his natural father Aemilius Paulus the obvious question:

quaeso, inquam, pater sanctissime atque optime, quoniam haec est vita, ut Africanum audio dicere, quid moror in terris? quin hue ad uos uenire propero?

SS 15 = Cicero DRP 6.15.15

‘I ask you’, I said, ‘most holy and best of fathers, since this is life, as I hear Africanus say, why do I hang around on earth? Why not hasten here to you?’

Aeneas, on being told that the horde of souls he sees congregating on the banks of Lethe are destined for reincarnation, makes a similar enquiry of Anchises:

o pater, anne aliquas ad caelum hinc ire putandum sublimis animas iterumque ad tarda reuerti corpora? quae lucis miseris tam dira cupidio?

Aeneid 6.719–21

O father, must we suppose that souls journey upwards from here to the sky above and once more return into sluggish bodies? What perverse desire for light afflicts the poor things?

Paulus responds to Scipio’s query with a thoroughly Roman reply: God has stationed us here on earth and we must remain at our post until he chooses to issue a recall; your task is to follow the example of your ancestors (mos maiorum again), cultivate iustitia and pietas, deserve well of the republic and you’ll be here with us in the fullness of time. Obviously a similar pietas–based answer is available to Anchises, but he does not give it; instead, he embarks on the rambling and confused cosmology of 724ff.16 which has none of the moral conviction of either Plato or Cicero17 and in the end does not answer

15 A good discussion of the significance of this question to Aeneas may be found in Di Cesare (1974), 114f. Bishop’s (1988) dismissal of it as being about no more than ‘the mechanics of rebirth’ (125) is clearly unjustifiable.

16 So Farrell (1991), 87: ‘Anchises’ description... presents the reader with an almost unintelligibly confused and eclectic eschatology.’ The confusion is deliberate, and simply to say that it is a consequence of Virgil’s drawing on a multiplicity of sources (as for example Horsfall [1981], 145) is not a sufficient explanation.

17 The synthetic nature of Anchises’ discourse is noted by Gransden (1990), 83, but he like many other commentators persists in seeing this speech as profound and revelatory. Cf. in particular Austin (1977), 220–21, who claims that it manifests ‘such visionary beauty and earnest solemnity [that] it is as if the poet were “thinking aloud”, giving expression to his most innmost beliefs.’ It is unfortunate that so many neglect to observe the quotation...
inspire his son is the promise of earthly fame: *incenditque animum famae uenientis amore*, ‘he inflames his son with love of fame to come’ (6.889).19 The shade of Palinurus, who stuck to his post until it killed him, testifies to the hollow nature of this reward.20

One other point about Aeneas’ question, and one which further prepares us for the ending of the book, is its Lucretian quality. Both verbally and thematically it echoes Lucretius’ poem: verbally in its positioning of *putandum st* at the end of the line (only here in the Aeneid, 23 times in the *De Rerum Natura*, thus giving it the quality of a Lucretian formula) and in the similar placing of *cupido* (‘lust’) in line 721; thematically in its evocation of the arguments against the lust for life in the last section of Book 3:

\[
\text{denique tanto opere in dubiis trepidare periclis quae mala nos subigit uitai tanta cupido?}
\]

Lucretius *DRN* 3.1076f.

Finally what evil and vast desire for life compels us to endure this level of anxiety in the midst of dangers whose outcome we cannot predict?

The allusion serves to remind us of the fact that the notion of souls queuing up to be born is one that is specifically derided at *DRN* 3.776–83. There are also important echoes of

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19 Feeney (1986), 4, notes the discrepancy between Anchises’ position and Scipio’s—although he expresses it as that between ‘Virgil’s’ and ‘Cicero’s’. But Feeney well brings out the way in which Virgil’s casting of Anchises’ speech makes it anything but the unqualified panegyric on ‘the grandeur that will be Rome’ that its deliverer thinks he has produced (6–16).

20 Cf. Segal (1966), 45–49. Segal notes the echo in Aeneas’ question of the sibyl’s *unde haec, o Palinure, tibi tam dira cupidio* (‘Whence comes this perverse desire of yours, Palinurus?’; 6.373): not only does this make us think of Palinurus here, but also it suggests that to Aeneas the desire of souls to be reborn is as contrary to the established order of things as Palinurus’ desire to enter the realm of the dead before receiving the proper funeral rites.

marks that surround this and the other major ideological statements in the poem.

18 Otis (1964) rightly points out that ‘the question is crucial’, that ‘any attempt to find consistency’ in Anchises’ response ‘is futile’, and that ‘the “answer” is in one sense disappointing’. Otis’ use of quotation marks around ‘answer’ is revealing (it is not a real answer, only a reply); his ‘in one sense’ is puzzling, since there seems no sense in which this ‘answer’ is not ‘disappointing’. Di Cesare’s (1974) claim (116) that ‘the discourse answers Aeneas’ question by denying its terms’ recognises the disjunction between question and answer but obscures the obvious conclusion to be drawn from it. Di Cesare’s discussion here as elsewhere is flawed by ignoring the intertextual references; while I have considerable sympathy for his eschewing what he flatteringly calls ‘the venerable art of *Quellenforschung*’ (preface viii), one simply cannot read the *Aeneid* without being alive to the way in which Virgil generates meaning through allusion.
the Lucretian style in Anchises’ speech as he moves into didactic mode: principio (‘first’, 774), quin et (‘yes, not even’, 735), nesciesst (‘it must be that’, 737), scilicet (‘so that, you see’, 750), nunc age (‘come now’, 756), expediam dictis (‘I shall set forth in words’, 759), lumina uitae (‘light of life’, 828).21 The irony of the way in which Anchises is made to echo Lucretius even as he attempts to invest his material with a completely opposite colouring is telling and significant.22 The fases...saeuasque securis (‘rods and cruel axes’) won by Brutus at Aen. 6.818f. cannot fail to call to mind Lucretius’ use of the same formula at DRN 3.995f. as he produces Sisyphus as paradigm of the futility of pursuing political power;23 Anchises’ laudumque immensa cupidio (‘immense lust for praises’) at Aen. 6.82321 recalls Lucretius’ honorum caeca cupidio (‘blind lust for honours’) at DRN 3.59; and right at the centre of the great ideological
discourse of style rather than content. The point is also observed by Gransden (1990), 82f., and by Powell (1992), 143. Powell sees in these echoes a ‘rebuke’ delivered by Virgil to his predecessor, a deliberate evocation of Lucretian language to deliver a diametrically opposite message. But Virgil’s normal practice in creating intertextual reference is to endow his text with greater subtlety rather than engage in polemic (pace Thomas [1986], 185–88); and in a context in which a major question mark is about to be placed against Anchises’ representation of events both cosmological and political, I think it is clear that we are dealing with irony, not rebuke.

23 Sisyphus...qui petere a populo fases saeuaisque seciris/imbibit (‘Sisyphus...who thirsts to seek from the people the rods and cruel axes’).

24 It is by no means irrelevant to note that this—coupled with amor patriae, ‘love of the fatherland’ (here overshadowing the love that is due to one’s children)—is precisely what impels Brutus to kill his sons: cf. Block (1980), 136.

passage (Aen. 6.847–53) the phrase regere imperio (‘rule by your command’, 851) catches Lucretius’ ut satius multo iam sit parere quietum/quam regere imperio res uelle et regna tenere (‘so it is much better to obey in peace than to wish to rule the world by your command and possess kingdoms’, DRN 5.1129f.).25 Even as Anchises most passionately pleads his case for the moral justification of empire, these Lucretian echoes keep intruding to undercut and negate the position he is advocating.

And so we come to the gate of false dreams. It is strange that the obvious meaning of the closing lines of Aeneid 6 has still not been universally accepted. If the ivory gate is that through which the manes (‘spirits of the dead’) send falsa insomnium (‘false dreams’) to the world above, then to have Anchises, one of the manes, send Aeneas and the sibyl through that gate is to identify them as false dreams; that is, like the dream despatched by Zeus to Agamemnon in Iliad 2, they are bearers of false information. To try to escape this conclusion is to engage in linguistic contortion. Take Gordon Williams for example:

It is suggested that our knowledge of what happened to Aeneas in the underworld is analogous to a deceptive dream. This does not mean that what is known is untrue, but that it needs interpretation.26

Falsa I would suggest does not mean ‘requiring interpretation’, but ‘false’. Nor is it an argument to say that Virgil has no choice but to have Anchises send Aeneas and the sibyl through the ivory gate because the gate of horn is reserved for ueris umbris (‘true shades’, 894), and that therefore the fact that they leave this way has limited

21 With the exception of the last two cases, I give Day Lewis’s (1966) translation of these expressions.

22 The Lucretian echoes are noted by Michels (1944), 147, and Habinek (1989), 240. Michels notes the diametrically opposite nature of Anchises discourse (‘That a doctrine so utterly opposed to his own should be presented in such a way that one could almost swear the words were spoken by Lucretius himself...would be enough to make even his ashes spin in their urn’) but draws no conclusion from it; for Habinek, the issue is one of style rather than content. The point is also observed by Gransden (1990), 82f., and by Powell (1992), 143. Powell sees in these echoes a ‘rebuke’ delivered by Virgil to his predecessor, a deliberate evocation of Lucretian language to deliver a diametrically opposite message. But Virgil’s normal practice in creating intertextual reference is to endow his text with greater subtlety rather than engage in polemic (pace Thomas [1986], 185–88); and in a context in which a major question mark is about to be placed against Anchises’ representation of events both cosmological and political, I think it is clear that we are dealing with irony, not rebuke.

23 Cf. Lyne (1994), 193f. Michels (1944), 148, sees this as Virgil ‘challenging’ Lucretius by using the echo to emphasise his divergence from the Epicurean doctrine of non–participation in public affairs. The same argument applies against this position as against that of Powell: see n.23 above.

24 Williams (1983), 57.
But the fact that the gate of ivory is Aeneas’ and the sibyl’s only means of egress adds another dimension. The implication here is that anyone who uses the dead as a source of moral instruction for the living, who looks in the past to find a moral paradigm for the present, who seeks, as we might say, an ethical imperative from the other side, is necessarily and inevitably deluding both himself and his fellow human beings. In its way this is as emphatic an attack on the traditional Roman aristocratic value system, the mos maiorum, as that of Lucretius a generation earlier; it also represents this poet’s judgment on the policy of a government and a princeps whose ideology and rhetoric was so firmly based on the values of the past. If we have been reading Aeneid 6 with a proper appreciation of its intertextual allusions, the fact that it ends as it does should cause us little surprise.

Bibliography


31 For an analysis of this aspect of Lucretius’ De Rerum Natura, see esp. Minyard (1985), 33–70.


