

Humanities 2

Lecture 5

REVIEW:

Aeneid Book IV: one of the great love stories of all time; but it is a love story told as a tale of speech and rhetoric, duty and desire.

Dido falls in love with Aeneas, in part through the ministrations of Cupid, but also as he is a story-teller: she becomes fascinated not by Aeneas the actor/hero but by Aeneas the tale-teller/poet.

She is “inflamed”: the imagery of fire permeates the book

Use of similes to locate the interior lives of characters in the exterior world

The coupling of Dido and Aeneas represented as a cosmic, meteorological narrative

Rumor as a monstrous personification; Rumor as an “anti-poet”

Aeneas as morally compromised; Dido as wronged; Virgil as commentator

Dido as fiction-maker; her ruse; her theatrical suicide

Aeneid Book V: a period of respite; games as rule-governed behavior that displace military prowess on to controlled ritual competition. The boat race as a kind of answer to the story of the Trojan Horse.

Today: Book VI

The hell-descent: key feature of epic narrative

Theory of poetry: the Sybil as a kind of poet figure; truth mixed with obscurity;
scenes of interpretation (augury; haruspication)

Emotional content: confrontation with the dead

“Allegory”: a story of education; the hero’s education as both
experiential and tutorial

Poetic content and mythology: the Story of Daedalus and Icarus

Philosophical content: development of Platonic and Stoic theories
of knowledge

Performative impact: we know Virgil read passages from this book
to Augustus and Octavia (his sister); the legacy of the emotional
response to literature.

General outline of key scenes in Book VI

The figure of the Sybil and the story of Daedalus and Icarus (1-59);

how is the Sybil a figure of pedagogical authority? How is Aeneas a good
student?

How is the story of Daedalus and Icarus a story of student/teacher, father/son?

BUT: how is this also a story of artistic achievement and filial failure?

What does it mean to sacrifice a son for glory? For escape? For salvation?

Aeneas and the Sybil: 136-72

The Sybil is “mingling true things with darkness” (138-9); obscuris vera involvens
Aeneas: “teach me the way” (151)

The golden bough (M 190-215; 251-84): The Sybil instructs Aeneas on what to do; “A bough is hidden in a shady tree . . . If the fates have summoned you, the bough will break off freely” (195-204); Aeneas asks to have the bough revealed to him; Then the twin doves appear (251-63). “He watched for omens” (268-69)

Omens, auguries, haruspications (M 316-55): Haruspication is the technique of finding prophecy or guidance in the quivering entrails of just slaughtered and sliced open animals. The Sibyl says: “allow me by your power to disclose / Things buried in the dark and deep of earth” (354-55)

HARUSPICATION REPRESENTS A FORM OF INTERPRETATION; IT SHOWS US HOW THE WORLD IS FULL OF SIGNS AND WE MUST GIVE THEM MEANING; IT IS A FIGURE FOR LITERARY UNDERSTANDING: THE WORK OF LITERATURE (OR ART) IS LIKE AN ANIMAL WE MUST DISSECT AND FIND THE MEANING IN IT, “BURIED.” SCHOLARSHIP IS A FORM OF BUILDING A COMMUNITY (“AWAY YOU UNINITIATED” 343).

The visions of the underworld, imagery, allusions, representations, drama (M 356-434)

The entry to the underworld as the “home of empty dreams” (375); Question:
Is the journey to the underworld like a dream? Is literature like a dream (as both offer symbolic narratives that require interpretation)?

The underworld as a realm of similes: 360-3; 407-11

More sleep imagery, with Cerberus having to be put to sleep with drugs (555)

Aeneas meets and speaks with Dido (M 593-626)

Scene of recognition: Aeneas uses her epithet “unhappy” (infelix) at 600;
How does Aeneas’s language here in addressing Dido either enhance or undermine his heroic or masculine status? “I swear by the stars the gods above and any that may be in this underearth, I was unwilling when I had to leave your shores.”

The Sybil as guide; After Aeneas meets with a series of former acquaintances,
The Sybil tells him to get going; there is a divided path; they must choose between Elysium and Dis (714-20)

The Elysian Fields and Anchises' speeches (sermons?) to Aeneas (M 844-1190)

They come upon "lands of gladness"; these plains have their own sun and their own stars; Orpheus, the ancient mythological figure of music, plays for them.

ELYSIUM IS A PLACE OF AESTHETIC, POETIC, PHILOSOPHICAL PLEASURE
ELYSIUM AS THE IDEAL ACADEMY OR SCHOOLROOM

Father Anchises, "lost in thought" (899)

When Aeneas meets Anchises, he tries to embrace him three times (924-27)

The language here EXACTLY ECHOES; the language at the end of
Book II when Aeneas tries to embrace the shade of Creusa

It also echoes the end of Book IV when Dido tries to rise three times

"like light winds or most like swift dreams" – again, Book VI as a kind of dream vision

Anchises' lecture (966-93): a lecture in the Platonic theory of knowledge: "fiery energy is in these seeds" the nature of human spiritual experience as predating birth; the nature of knowledge as a form of remembering; the notion that the mind is not a blank slate at birth.

The philosophical content of Book VI and its understanding during the reception history of the Aeneid:

Platonic vs. Stoic epistemology: Epistemology is the theory of knowledge.

Do we know things by virtue of our senses?

Do we know things by virtue of our mental abilities?

Broadly speaking, two different theories of knowledge emerged in antiquity.

One was associated with the school of Plato. This theory held that

the human soul pre-existed its time in the body;

at birth, human beings were endowed with a set of innate ideas from that pre-existence;

learning was therefore an act of remembering;

the soul in the body was a kind of imprisonment;

the central image for understanding and teaching was oral communication

and that writing was only a representation of language, and thus suspect, incapable of fully and accurately representing thought, and furthermore damaging to memory and traditional modes of learning.

The other theory was associated with the Stoics (called the Stoics because they met and learned under the covered archways of the academy, known as Stoa).

This theory held that:

the mind at birth was a blank slate (in Latin, tabula rasa) and that there were no innate ideas;

learning was an act of experiencing the world through the senses, and therefore that all sensory impressions were new and contributed to knowledge of the world; the central image for understanding and teaching was writing: the mind was likened to a blank page or tablet on which letters or words were written or inscribed.

A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO THE AENEAS:

THE POEM CONSTANTLY JUXTAPOSES STOIC AND PLATONIC NOTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING.

MANY SCENES IN THE EARLY PART OF THE POEM IN WHICH AENEAS AND OTHERS RESPOND DIRECTLY TO SENSE IMPRESSIONS; IN WHICH THE GOAL OF THE POEM IS TO HAVE AN EFFECT ON THE SENSES OF THE READER.

BUT, ANCHISES ADVOCATES A DIFFERENT THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE
BOOKS I-VI BEGIN IN A WORLD OF STOIC IMPRESSIONISM AND END IN A
WORLD OF PLATONIC UNDERSTANDING.

Anchises' Prophecy: Anchises tells a kind of foretold history of Rome: its founding, its imperial experience; 1044-1137.

THIS IS THE POLITICAL CONTENT OF THE BOOK; A WAY OF JUSTIFYING THE RULE OF AUGUSTUS CAESAR AS SOMETHING FOREORDAINED AND WITHIN THE NATURAL ORDER OF THINGS; LEGITIMACY

THE STORY OF MARCELLUS: (1140-82)

Marcellus was a hero of the Second Punic War (the war between the Romans and The Carthaginians, 3rd century BC).

This Marcellus was a hero of old Rome: 1140-47

BUT he is also the ancestor of the child, named Marcellus, of Octavia, who is Augustus Caesar's SISTER; Augustus had chosen him to be his successor; he died in 23 BC at the age of 19.

THIS Marcellus shows up at line 1152: "Who, father, moves beside this man?"

Anchises describes him, but tells his own son, who is listening to him, not to push it; Don't force me to tell you this terrible story, he says; but, he says, if only you could Be as wonderful as this boy, Marcellus (1178-82)

Virgil read this passage before Augustus and Octavia;

The fourth-century writer, Aelius Donatus, in his life of Virgil, wrote:

”He recited three whole books for Augustus: the second, fourth, and sixth – this last out of his well-known affection for Octavia, who (being present at the recitation) is said to have fainted at the lines about her son,
You shall be Marcellus [Aen. 6.884]. Revived only with difficulty, she ordered ten-thousand sesterces to be granted to Virgil for each of the verses.”

AND SO:

How does Book VI tell a story of parents and children? How is the cultural history of this book rewritten as a story of parents and children?

Daedalus/Icarus: father moves up and loses son

Anchises/Aeneas: son moves down and regains father

Octavia/Marcellus: the story of a lost son generates a political patrimony for the poet

Forsan et haec olim memnise juvabit

What does it mean to remember? How do we learn from the past?

How does this phrase take on both a spiritual as well as a personal resonance:

i.e., how is it about shared communities of belief as well as the camaraderie of life?

AND SO, FOR NEXT TIME, AS WE READ THE GOSPELS AND MOVE INTO THE CHRISTIAN WORLD:

HOW CAN WE SEE THESE EARLY CHRISTIAN TEXTS AS FORMS OF NARRATIVE?

HOW CAN THE EXPERIENCE OF READING VIRGIL HELP US UNDERSTAND THE LITERARY AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONTENT AND EXPERIENCE OF THE EARLY GOSPELS?

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AUTHORITY GAINED BY SPEAKING AND BY WRITING?

HOW DOES VIRGIL PROVIDE LATE IMPERIAL CULTURE WITH IDEALS OF TEACHING AND STORY TELLING: VENUS, AENEAS, THE SYBIL, ANCHISES?

HOW DO EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS SIMILARY PROVIDE IMPERIAL CULTURE WITH IDEALS OF TEACHING AND STORY TELLING: JESUS, THE GOSPEL WRITERS; ST. PAUL?

HOW IS EARLY CHRISTIANITY PRESENTED AS AN ISSUE IN: THE FAMILY;THE NATURE OF MIRACLE; THE NATURE OF PEDAGOGICAL AUTHORITY; THE NATURE OF LOVE AND DESIRE?