

## The God-like Dead: Dream apparitions in Post-Augustan Epic

While gods, oracles, augurs, omens, and even the author himself typically issue prophecies in ancient epic, Post-Augustan Imperial epic more often employs a more unexpected means of foretelling the future - the dead. Focusing on the role of the dead as divinatory practitioners, the aim of this paper will be two-fold. Previously, scholars such as Dick (1963) and Bernstein (2000), have recognized the prophetic nature of apparitions, but focused more on their ability to act as narrative motivators rather than the actual content of the monitions issued by apparitions. Instead, this paper first will focus on analyzing the content of these prophecies, rather than their narrative function. I will demonstrate how, unlike their intertextual predecessors, apparitions in Post-Augustan epic exclusively appear to foretell or foreshadow a critical event in the text, almost always a battle which will end disastrously, or a character's inevitable death. Secondly, this paper will address the issue of source of authority of apparitional prophets. I will argue that apparitions are constructed within the text to mimic the divine, thus giving them the literary authority to make such prophecies.

Certainly, Roman epic from the time of Ennius has featured occasional occurrences of apparitions who appear to characters in the text and tell them of the future in some way, often using dreams as the vehicle for the visit. The shade of Homer comes to Ennius in the *Annales* to prophecy of Ennius' greatness. His soul has transmigrated from a peacock into the body of Ennius, making Ennius the reincarnation of Homer (*Ann.* 1 frag. 9). In *Aeneid* 2.371-400, the ghost of Hector appears to Aeneas in a dream, warning him that the Greeks have infiltrated Troy and will capture the city. In the dream, the ghost not only disseminates this information to Aeneas, but Hector also advises his compatriot to flee. Like the ghost of Hector, apparitions in Post-Augustan epic will also issue monitions to the characters they visit. The ghosts of Julia in *Bellum Civile* 3, Laius in *Thebaid* 1, and Scipio's father in *Punica* 15 each appear in a dream and warn the receiver of an impending disaster which later will be recognized as the crux of the narrative. While Hector in *Aeneid* 2 warns Aeneas of the destruction of Troy, Aeneas' flight from the city does not result in a disastrous ending, but the eventual founding of Rome. In contrast, the events presaged by apparitions in Post-Augustan epic will all lead to the characters' demise. These same types of prophecies are not issued by other more traditional types of divination, but devoted to apparitions alone.

Apparitions who predict the future are curious because, unlike other divinatory practitioners, ghostly prophets do not have the traditional ties to the gods. This link is evident when considering the divine source from which an augur or omen, for example, is thought to receive his authority. This paper will consider why apparitions are privileged over traditional types of divination when it comes to this particular type of prophecy and, subsequently, will argue that apparitions derive their authority to make such warnings because the author has constructed them in the text to allude to the gods. In serving the role as prophet, apparitions have stepped in to the role of traditional divinity, fulfilling its function in the absence of the traditional divine machinery typically absent or perverted from the norm as is characteristic of Post-Augustan epic.

### Works Cited:

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