

Caieta's Funeral, the Circe Episode, and the Mouth of the Tiber at the Beginning of *Aeneid* 7

Why does the second half of Vergil's *Aeneid* start with these three episodes before he belatedly inserts a proem (37ff.) and lets the action of book 7 begin? This paper will argue that these three "transitional" episodes (Fordyce, xvi) need to have a meaning beyond Vergil's attempt to stylize himself as a Hellenistic poet if they are so important that they manage to postpone a proem.

As far as the burial of Caieta is concerned, it has often been said that these first seven verses connect book 7 rather nicely to the last two verses of book 6. In an attempt to link these books as well as the two halves of the *Aeneid*, some researchers claim, Vergil wanted to show some variation in how to start a new book without presenting us with a proem right at its start. Instead, by just picking up the last lines of the previous volume of the entire work Vergil made Caieta the linchpin of the middle of his entire work. Yet, as the funeral of Caieta links this passage to Misenus, Palinurus, and Anchises and their funerals, I would say that it is also important that Aeneas is able to bury his nurse whereas he was unable to bury his wife in book 2 (770-794). What went wrong in book 2 in regard to a very important woman in Aeneas' life now goes right. Within her speech in book 2, Creusa explicitly predicts what is happening now in book 7: Aeneas finally arrives in *Hesperia* (2.781, cf. 7.4) and at the river Tiber (*Thybris* 2.782, cf. *Tiberinus* 6.30). Even if Vergil does not explicitly make the connection between Creusa's words in book 2 and the description of the Tiber's mouth in book 7, the reader who has not forgotten what he heard in book 2 can see why Aeneas is justifiably happy (*laetus*, 7.36) before the proem and the "real" second half of the *Aeneid* sets in. Creusa connects Caieta's funeral and the description of the mouth of the river.

Between Caieta's funeral and Aeneas' arrival at the Tiber we get another ekphrasis. This time Circe's home is described to us in terms that remind us of Homer's Circe as well as of Apollonius' version of her. In addition, Vergil's Circe reminds us of Homer's Calypso. By letting his main hero sail past Circe's island, Vergil thus allows his *praeteritio* (Nelis 261) to work on several levels. By reminding the reader of Calypso and Circe, he recalls Dido, too. This time in book 7, however,

Aeneas escapes temptation unlike in Northern Africa in book 1. Neptune sees to it that the Trojans get favorable winds and can escape both the sorceress and the shoals of the island (7.23) whereas in book 1 he came too late to prevent the sea storm that threatened to destroy the Trojan fleet. Neptune was then (1.145) only able to clean up the mess afterwards. He, too, however, did not prevent the Trojans from coming to shore at Carthage. The fact that Vergil called the spot a harbor where the Trojans landed in Africa (1.159) is picked up by 7.22 where Circe's island has a harbor, too. What were the *proxima litora* of Carthage in 1.157 would have been *proxima litora* again, this time those of Circe's island (7.10), dire shores indeed (7.22).

In book 7 now everything is different. Vergil's literary technique is new. Also, there is no raging Juno. Benevolent Neptune is present on time. Fortunately, the reader will think, Aeneas does not have to go through another frivolous affair of the kind that also cost Odysseus a year. And the case of the Trojans is sped on even if this is not Aeneas' own achievement.

Besides, Aeneas already had visited the underworld. Circe was not needed for instructions on how to do that. As in other cases, Aeneas again does not go where Odysseus has gone before.

Three passages that at first sight appear to be a rather unconnected hodgepodge of whatever other funny things happened on the way to the Tiber are in fact intertwined. By simultaneously excluding and including Circe and by containing her through Caieta and Creusa, Vergil manages to set the tone for his *maius opus* (7.44).

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