

Enthymeme in *Aeneid* VI 119-123 and Milton's Emulation of Virgil

In supplicating the Sybil, Aeneas discloses, obliquely, a hitherto unavowed purpose in going to the underworld, one that may account for her addressing him as one “‘born of the blood of gods’” (“*sate sanguine divum*” VI 125). Pleading that she might take pity on one who is both a father and a son (VI 116-117), Aeneas refers to those who have not simply journeyed to the underworld themselves; rather, he names those (Orpheus, Pollux, Theseus, Hercules) who have redeemed or have endeavored to redeem to life others imprisoned in death (IV 119-123). The logic underlying his entreaty consists in an enthymeme or uncompleted syllogism, but the implication is quite clear. These heroes, descended from gods, have raised the dead; I, too, am the offspring of Jove. The unstated (and all the more commanding because unstated) conclusion is that I, also, have the potential to redeem someone, specifically Anchises, from death. The presentation is elliptical, richly poignant, quite Virgilian. Aeneas wishes not only to see his father in the underworld but also to restore him to the upper light. He proposes himself not just as the twice-born soul who will journey to Hades and then return but as *salvator*, the god-born hero whose selfless courage will recover another from the dead. In his allusive evocation of the Aeneas of Book VI, Milton would find not only an unbaptized version of his Christian “better fortitude / Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom” (IX 31-32) but also a type of the soteriological figure whose heroic virtue is a guarantor of life, that “greater Man” who will “Restore us and regain [for us] the blissful Seat” (I 4-5).

Discerning allusions, the practiced reader's art, requires a measure of restraint, the avoiding of gratuitous associations or of the cognoscente's delight in a verbal echo that is a grace note merely. Where there is clear intertextual relationship, the issue always is to determine whether the allusion indicates how a writer wishes to discriminate the later work from the earlier

one. Milton's wide-ranging emulation of Virgil is complex, and his attention to *Aeneid* VI calls for scrutiny. In the proem to the Third Book of *Paradise Lost*, Milton crafts a pointed allusive engagement that entails comment about *katabasis* or descent into the underworld and subsequent re-ascent, "hard and rare" (III 21). His recalling of a key Virgilian source (*Aeneid* VI 125-129) merits sustained reflection for a number of reasons. Triply repeated, it is a strong and multivalent, not a casual or glancingly verbal, recollection and transmutation. It inaugurates for Milton a recurring pattern of imagery that concerns the significance of viewing—and viewing love in—the paternal or filial face (III 44; III 139-142; III 256-265; III 384-389; VI 680; VI 719-721; XI 315-317), the same imagery that proves plangently evocative in Aeneas's asking the Sybil to grant him access to Hades that he might again look upon the face of his father (VI 106-108). It involves, in Aeneas's evocation of the figures of Orpheus and Hercules (VI 119-120, 122-123), a familiar mode of assimilating classical story into Christian teaching. Moreover, it registers crucial distinctions concerning heroic meaning within Virgilian and Miltonic epic, suggesting much about the engagement with history that each poet projects. Virgil has Anchises redirect his son to raise not the dead, as Aeneas has wished (VI 119-123), but new standards of responsible commitment to public action within historical discourse (VI 847-853). Milton, however, has the Son of God describe the course of his downgoing into hell and subsequent resurrection (III 217-265) as a going beyond history to the promised scriptural *apokatastasis*, the spiritual restitution or making all things new (Acts 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28). In his poetry as in his life, Milton turned from the responsibilities of civic duty, and his involvement with the Sixth Book of the *Aeneid* reveals the former Secretary of Foreign Tongues under Cromwell to have quite abandoned any hope for the *civitas terrena* as he yearned for salvation within a transcendent City of God.

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