

## Gender-flipping the Katabatic Hero: Starbuck as Aeneas in *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-2009)

Since 2009, the American television series *Battlestar Galactica* has been posited as a science fiction re-imagining of Vergil's *Aeneid* (Higgins 2009; Pache 2010). Both texts trace the exilic journey of a civilization-ending war's survivors toward the unfamiliar but prophesied home of ancestral relatives, which is secured by another war that requires reconciliation with those adversaries. While the dominant Aeneas-figure is veteran military officer and leader of the refugees' fleet, Commander William Adama, his alienation from religious faith results in some of Aeneas' major functions being distributed to other characters. This paper focuses on how Adama's adoptive daughter, ace fighter pilot and devout believer Kara "Starbuck" Thrace, steps into Aeneas' role as the katabatic hero.

The hero's descent to the Underworld is explicitly performed by Aeneas in *Aeneid* Book 6, but also suggested in his visits to other realms associated with death or the destroyed past, e.g. re-entering Troy after it has burned, attempting to settle in the accursed land of Thrace, and receiving hospitality in Helenus' uncanny replica of Troy at Buthrotum, complete with cenotaph for Hector (see e.g. Quint 1993, Grillo 2010). Starbuck too makes several journeys to a realm associated with death; each journey results in her retrieval of a device and/or knowledge that propels her wandering people toward their prophesied homeland. One journey specifically requires her to acquire a numinous golden bough-like token of entry to a holy tomb, where she witnesses a revelation of the future: what the constellations will look like while standing at the fleet's prophesied destination, and therefore a star-map indicating its location. Upon reaching this destination, Starbuck also fulfills her unique personal destiny: transformation into a transcendent being, similar to Aeneas' prophesied apotheosis.

While this woman's equivalent competency in achieving goals associated with male epic heroes is patent, the series also demonstrates the difference that gender makes by exploring the female warrior's anxieties about domesticity, reproduction, and motherhood through some of her *katabases*. Aeneas' Underworld journey re-affirms the father-son bond that is thematically central to the *Aeneid* and supports Aeneas' assumption of his social role as *pater* (see e.g. Camps 1969, James 1995, Farrell 1999). The tension between gender roles as defined under patriarchy and Starbuck's chosen identity plays out vividly in a variation on the classical tradition's most famous female *katabasis*: Hades' abduction of Persephone. While imprisoned in an underground replica of her former home, Starbuck is forced by her godlike captor to play-act "family dinner" every night. Her response as a warrior, however, is to refuse this domestic imprisonment by repeatedly killing her endlessly self-resurrecting "husband"—until she is presented with a "daughter" whose dependence forces Starbuck to confront her fears of motherhood and responsibility to protect "her" child. Even after she escapes, Starbuck's subsequent *katabasis* further exhumes, and finally resolves, her foundational conflict with her dead, abusive mother in a meeting facilitated by a numinous guide, by journeying into the underworld of her own consciousness.

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