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THE MYTH OF VIRGIL'S AENEID*

JACOB KLEIN

It is impossible to read the *Aeneid* without being constantly reminded of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Nor can one read the *Aeneid* without becoming aware that the poem intends to glorify Rome and Rome's imperial and pacifying power under Caesar Octavian Augustus. All of you, I think, and also all Virgil commentators agree on these points. Let me quote two ancient ones.

Servius, 4th century A.D., has this to say: "This is Virgil's purpose: to imitate Homer and to praise Augustus in the light of his ancestors" (*Intentio Vergilii haec est, Homerum imitari et Augustum laudare a parentibus*).

Macrobius, 5th century, explains: Virgil

held his eyes intently upon Homer in order to emulate not only Homer's greatness but also the simplicity and power of his diction and its quiet majesty. Hence the multifarious magnificence of the various personages among his heroes; hence the intervention of the gods; hence the weight of mythical details; hence the natural way of expressing passions; hence the tracing back of the origin of monuments; hence the elevation of his metaphors; hence the ringing sound of his rolling diction; hence the climactic splendor of single incidents.

This "sweet imitation," says Macrobius, leads Virgil to the point of even imitating Homer's vices.

We have to note that these ancient commentators attribute to Virgil a double purpose: not only is it his intention to praise Augustus, his imitation of Homer is, according to them, also an end in itself.

Let me give you a series of examples of what these commentators call Virgil's imitation of Homer. I shall quote, in an English version, lines from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and corresponding lines, again in an English version, from the *Aeneid*.

Odyss. XII, 403: "But when we left that island and no other land appeared, but only sky and sea, then verily the son of Kronos set a black cloud above the hollow ship, and the sea grew dark beneath it." *Aen.* III, 192: "After our ships gained the deep, and now no longer any land is seen, but sky on all sides and on all sides sea, then a murky rain-cloud loomed overhead, bringing night and tempest, while the wave shuddered darkling." This is repeated in *Aen.* V, 8. (Note that Virgil does not mention Zeus, the son of Kronos.)

Iliad VIII, 16: "Tartaros. . . as far beneath Hades as heaven is high above the earth." *Aen.* VI, 578: 'While Tartarus' self gapes with abrupt descent and stretches twice as far, down through the shades, as the heaven-

* A lecture given at St. John's College in Annapolis, Md., on February 25, 1966.

ward gazing eye looks up to Olympus and the firmament." (Note the change from a one to one ratio to a two to one ratio.)

Iliad VI, 305: Theano, wife of Antenor, priestess of Athene in Troy, prays: "Lady Athene, that dost guard our city, fairest among goddesses, break now the spear of Diomedes, and grant furthermore that himself may fall headlong before the Scaean gates." *Aen.* XI, 483: The Latin matrons implore Juno: "O mighty in arms, mistress in war, Tritonian maid, break with thine hand the spear of the Phrygian pirate [that is, of Aeneas], hurl him prone to earth and stretch him prostrate beneath our lofty gates."

Iliad I, 234: Achilles swears, in *enmity* towards Agamemnon: "verily by this staff, that shall no more put forth leaves or shoots since at the first it left its stump among the mountains, neither shall it again grow green . . ." *Aen.* XII, 206: Latinus swears, in *friendship* towards Aeneas: "even as this scepter shall never again be dressed in light foliage and put forth branch and shade, since once in the forest it was hewn from the nether stem . . ."

Iliad XVI, 249: "So spake he [Achilles] in prayer, and Zeus, the counsellor, heard him, and a part the Father granted him, and a part denied." *Aen.* XI, 794: "Phoebus heard [the prayer of Arruns about Camilla], and in thought vouchsafed that part of his vow should prosper; the other part he scattered to the flying breezes."

Iliad IV, 122: "And he [Pandarus] drew the bow, clutching at once the notched arrow and the string of ox's sinew: the string he brought to his breast and to the bow the iron arrow-head. But when he had drawn the great bow into a round, the bow twanged and the string sang aloud, and the keen arrow leapt" (namely towards Menelaus who is *not* killed). *Aen.* XI, 858: The goddess Opis, sent by Diana, "drew the fleet arrow from the golden quiver, stretched the bow with grim intent, and drew it afar, till the curving ends met each with other, and at length, with levelled hands, she touched the pointed steel with her left, her breast with her right and with the bow-string." (She aims at Arruns who *is* killed.)

Odys. XI, 206: "Thrice I [Odysseus] sprang towards her [his mother], and my heart bade me clasp her, and thrice she flitted from my arms like a shadow or a dream, and pain grew ever sharper at my heart." *Aen.* VI, 699: "Thrice, where he [Aeneas] stood, he assayed to throw his arms round his neck [his father's neck]: thrice the phantom fled through the hands that clutched in vain, light as the winds and fleet as the pinions of sleep." But we can also read in the second book of the *Aeneid*, verse 792: "Thrice, then I [Aeneas] strove to throw my arms round her neck [the neck of Aeneas' wife's shadow]: thrice the form, that I clasped in vain, fled through my hands, light as the winds and fleet as the pinions of sleep."

Odys. XIX, 562: "For two are the gates of shadowy dreams, and one is fashioned of horn and one of ivory. Those dreams that pass through the gate of sawn ivory deceive men, bringing words that find no fulfilment. But those that come forth through the gate of polished horn bring true

issues to pass, when any mortal sees them." (Penelope is saying these words.) *Aen.* VI, 892: "There are two gates of Sleep:-of horn, fame tells, the one, through which the spirits of truth find an easy passage; the other, wrought smooth-gleaming with sheen of ivory, but false the dreams that the nether powers speed therefrom to the heaven above." (Virgil, the author, is saying this.)

These examples can be multiplied many, many times. There would be no point for me to continue quoting. But let us take notice of the fact that there is almost always some weighty difference embedded in the otherwise completely analogous phrasing and imagery.

However the similarity between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* on the one hand and the *Aeneid* on the other goes far beyond phrasing and imagery. Let me give you another series of examples of what is called Virgil's imitation of Homer.

When Odysseus arrives in Ithaca, Pallas Athene fills the countryside with mist so that Odysseus cannot recognize it. When Aeneas arrives in Carthage, Venus conveys him in a cloud so that nobody can see him. Before meeting with Penelope Odysseus is beautified by Pallas Athene. Before meeting Dido Aeneas is beautified by Venus. A young man, Elpenor, falls from the roof of Circe's house; Odysseus sees his shade in Hades and buries the corpse when he returns to the light of day. The pilot of Aeneas' fleet, Palinurus, falls from his ship and is subsequently killed by a barbarous tribe; his shade is seen by Aeneas in the nether world and his corpse buried later on. Diomedes and Odysseus, two seasoned warriors, engage in a spying mission at night, kill a quantity of Trojans and bring their enterprise to a successful and glorious end. Nisus and Euryalus, two young men, try to break through the enemy lines at night, kill a quantity of Latins and die gloriously but unsuccessfully at the end. The shade of Ajax keeps a contemptuous silence when facing Odysseus in Hades. So does the shade of Dido when confronted by Aeneas in the nether world. In point of fact, innumerable episodes in the *Aeneid* have their analogues in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. There are exceptions, as, for instance, the diverse prophecies addressed to Aeneas, the transformation of the Trojan ships into mermaids in Book IX and the rôle of the warrior maid Camilla. Camilla has her analogue, however, in Penthesilea who, although not to be found in Homer, appears in many classical Greek texts and is mentioned by Virgil himself (I, 491). There is parallelism between Menelaus, Paris, and Helen on the one hand, and Turnus, Aeneas and Lavinia on the other, whatever the difference between these personages and their relationships. There is parallelism between Achilles and Patroklos on the one hand, and Aeneas and Pallas on the other, again whatever the difference between these pairs. To the catalogue of ships in the second book of the *Iliad* corresponds the catalogue of the Latin armies in the seventh book of the *Aeneid*. To the funeral games in honor of Patroklos correspond the games in honor of Anchises. Three times does Achilles circle the city of Priam in hot pursuit of Hector, while Aeneas covers five circles on the plain around the

city of Latinus in hot pursuit of Turnus. To the shield of Achilles fashioned by Hephaistos upon the insistence of Achilles's mother corresponds the shield of Aeneas fashioned by Vulcan upon the insistence of Aeneas's mother. But the difference here is great: on Achilles's shield are moulded Heaven and Earth, Peace and War, Marriage and Litigation, Work and Leisure, and all the bounties of the earth; on Aeneas's shield are shown the glorious deeds of the Romans culminating in Octavian's victory at Actium.

What is the significance of this persistent and detailed, yet unfaithful "imitation"? In other poems, written before the *Aeneid*, especially in the *Bucolics*, Virgil also imitated his Greek predecessors, especially Theocritus. But this imitation involved only the general pattern, the general mood and style of the poems and hardly any of their details. The tradition tells us that Virgil, in his younger years, conceived the plan to write an epic poem devoted to the glory of Rome but that he gave up that plan because he found the task too difficult. In his later years he took it up again, prodded by Augustus, perhaps, and worked on the *Aeneid* for eleven years – until his death. It is in this period that what is called his imitation of Homer flourished supremely. The question we face is just this: why was it necessary for Virgil to imitate Homer to the extent he did? The ancient commentators I quoted in the beginning were late commentators. Their opinion that one of the purposes of the poem was the imitation of Homer and their implied opinion that such an undertaking was in itself praiseworthy were not shared by Virgil's contemporaries, we are told. His contemporaries reproached him for borrowing too much from Homer. Virgil is reported to have answered them, proudly and enigmatically, that it was easier to steal from Neptune his trident and from Hercules his club than to steal a verse from Homer. What did he mean by that?

Let us go back to the unquestionable purpose of the *Aeneid*. It is the praise of Augustus and the projection of an exalted vision of the Roman world. What is the background of this praise and this projection? The answer is: a century of civil disorders and wars, beginning in 133 B.C., after the end of the Punic and Spanish wars, and a passionate and widespread desire for peace. Peace is finally restored by Octavian in the year 31. Let me quote from a modern critic, Edward Kennard Rand: "To Virgil's contemporaries, hardly any religious or political event could have had a more spectacular importance than the closing of Janus' temple [which act signified peace] twice in the reign of Augustus, once after the victory of Actium [over Antony] and once in the year 25 . . . Only once before in all Roman history had this happy event occurred, namely, at the completion of the First Punic War."

This peace is based on Roman rule under Ceasar Augustus. And the origin of this Roman rule is the great subject of Virgil's epic endeavor.

But how to attack so vast a subject? Let us understand Virgil's predicament. We, today, have an easy way of dealing with such a subject. To praise deeds or events, we call them "historical." We say: an historical meeting or an historical battle took place on such or such a day. In saying

this we mean to pay tribute to the importance of that meeting or that battle. The adjective "historical" is used as a superlative which confers to an event a transcendent rank and the laurel of undying glory. But to Virgil – and not to him alone – the medium of praise is not History but Myth. For only the glowing light of a myth is able to illuminate the intrinsic unintelligibility of human deeds and sufferings. To write an epic poem on the grandeur of Rome means, therefore, to construct a myth. To use a Greek word familiar to Virgil, it means to *μυθοποιεῖν*.

Most myths are anonymous. They are there, filling, mirror-like, the horizon of human lives with splendid or dark or sometimes terrifying figures that bring to pass wondrous and awesome events. But there are also myths attached to names, to names of "mythmakers," as, for example, to Homer, to Hesiod, to Plato. Can one compete with these mythmakers? Can one invent "new" myths? In fact, did those mythmakers I have just mentioned invent theirs? Did they not merely imitate or modify or transpose myths in existence long before them, just as the Greek tragedians did? How, then, shall Virgil go about it? Virgil has before him a plethora of legends related to various sites and monuments in Rome and Italy. The legend of Aeneas himself, of Aeneas the Trojan, the source of Roman stock, is well known in Roman lands. Can these legends lend themselves to form the nucleus of the myth Virgil is after? Must not other myths be taken into consideration? Virgil himself seems to have cherished the myth of the succession of the ages of mankind. Let us consider this myth briefly.

Hesiod tells it in his *Works and Days*. Five generations of men have so far succeeded each other: first the golden one, in Kronos's time, when men lived as if they were gods, abundantly, without hard work or pain, without suffering from old age; then the gods created the second generation, of silver, far worse than the first, shortlived, troublesome, lacking piety; then came the age of bronze, when men were terrible and strong, destroying each other; then Zeus created the fourth generation of hero-men, who are also called half-gods; they besieged seven-gated Thebes and fought before Troy for the sake of lovely-haired Helen; those who did not perish in carnage and war were settled by Zeus in the islands of the blessed, at the extreme end of the world, with Kronos, freed from bondage, as their king; finally came the age of iron, in which we live now, in which the sense of right and wrong has been almost entirely lost, in which force reigns and vengeance and weariness; but Zeus will destroy this generation of mortals also. This story of the ages of men can also be found in the *Book of Daniel*, supposedly written some hundred years before Virgil and in all probability unknown to him, but still symptomatic for the myth's universality and influence. In the second chapter of this book Daniel interprets a dream King Nebuchadnezzar had had. According to this interpretation the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar is the kingdom of gold, of power and strength and glory; it will be succeeded by another, presumably of silver, which in turn will be followed by a kingdom of brass; then will come a fourth kingdom, that of iron and clay, in which kingdom men "shall not

cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay"; at last the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will stand forever. So much, then, for the myth of the ages of mankind.

But Virgil also knew the oriental and Greek doctrines of the Great Year. The Great Year is the time it takes for all stars and all planets to return to the same position, with respect to us, that they once occupied. This time constitutes an age, an αἰών. Once this age reaches its completion, a palingenesis occurs and a new αἰών begins, identical with the preceding one. This doctrine was also preserved in the collection of oracles of the Cumaean Sibyl, which oracles constitute the books of Sibylline songs widely diffused among the people. The cycle of cosmic life, the αἰών, was divided into ten great months. The end of each of these months and the transition into a new one was supposed to be announced by a celestial sign. The sun grew pale after the murder of Julius Caesar, and it is reported that the apparition of a comet during the funeral honors rendered to the victim was interpreted by a soothsayer to indicate the end of the ninth cosmic month and the beginning of the tenth. Some amalgamation between the doctrine of cosmic cycles and the myth of the four or five ages of mankind must have occurred in the course of time. Each cycle repeats the succession of ages, from the golden to the iron one. We witness this in Virgil's fourth Eclogue in the *Bucolics*, which, I hope, most of you have read. Let me quote a few lines from it: "Now is come the last age of the song of Cumae; the great line of the centuries begins anew. Now the Virgin too returns, the reign of Saturn returns; now a new generation descends from heaven on high." The Virgin is Astraea or Justice, last of the immortals to leave the earth. The eclogue is addressed and dedicated to Asinius Pollio, a patron of Virgil, who was elected consul in the year 41 and played a decisive role in the reconciliation between the two mighty leaders, Marc Antony and Octavian, at Brundisium in the year 40. But the emphasis in the eclogue is on a child "in whom the iron brood shall first cease and a golden race spring up throughout the world." The new age shall begin in the consulship of Pollio and the mighty months will then commence their march. The babe shall have the gift of divine life and rule over a world pacified through his father's virtues. His cradle shall pour forth flowers for his delight. Goats will come to the milking unbidden and the ox lie down with the lion. "On wild brambles shall hang the purple grape, and the stubborn oak shall distil dewy honey." The serpent will be no more, and the false poison-plant perish. Any lingering traces of human crime shall gradually disappear. In the beginning these traces will still be visible – in sailings across the seas, in the building of walls around towns, in the cleaving of the earth with furrows. Another Argo shall be manned to seek the golden fleece, "and again shall a great Achilles be sent to Troy." But when the child will have become a man,

the trader shall quit the sea, . . . every land shall bear all fruits. . . . The earth shall not feel the harrow, nor the vine the pruning hook; the sturdy ploughman, too,

shall now loose his oxen from the yoke. Wools shall no more learn to counterfeit varied hues, but of himself the ram in the meadows shall change his fleece, now to sweetly blushing purple, now to saffron yellow; of its own will shall scarlet clothe the grazing lambs.

This prophetic poem is written in a dark and oracular vein, imitating, perhaps, the Sibylline songs. The identity of the child has remained a controversial subject among scholars. The preponderant opinion tends to recognize in the child a son of Asinius Pollio. Christian interpreters considered the fourth Eclogue as a prophecy of the Messiah, saw in the child Jesus, the Christ, and in Virgil a pagan Isaiah. Not by chance does Virgil play the role of Dante's guide and mentor in Hell and Purgatory. It is conceivable that the Sibylline oracles, re-assembled after the genuine ones had burned with the Capitol in the year 83, might have contained some Jewish oracles reflecting the spirit and the substance of Isaiah's prophecy and that Virgil might have experienced their spell. What seems indubitable is that the fourth Eclogue expresses the overwhelming longing for a New Beginning, a new age of Peace. The mythical idea of the completion of a cosmic cycle and of a return to the happy days of Kronos, the days of Saturn, seems ever-present to Virgil's mind.

We thus perceive the factors which determine the composition of the *Aeneid* devoted to the glories of Rome and to the bounties of Peace under the aegis of Caesar Augustus. The legend of the Trojan hero Aeneas, the ancestor of Roman power, would become part and parcel of the myth of rebirth which tells of the return of the days of Saturn, of the golden age, after completion of a cosmic cycle and the beginning of a new αἰών.

Aeneas will land on Saturnian soil, in Latium. King Latinus, who rules "over lands and towns in the calm of a long peace" and himself descends from Saturn, will tell Aeneas, an offspring of Jupiter: "be not unaware that the Latins are Saturn's race, righteous not by bond or laws, but self-controlled of their own free will and by the custom of their ancient god." Evander, the "good man," king of the Arcadians, who is going to ally himself with Aeneas at precisely the spot where Rome shall stand, will recount to Aeneas the origins of Saturnian rule:

In these woodlands the native Fauns and Nymphs once dwelt, and a race of men sprung from trunks of trees and hardy oak, who had no rule or art of life, and knew not how to yoke the ox or to lay up stores, or to busband their gains; but tree branches nurtured them and the huntsman's savage fare. First from heavenly Olympus came Saturn, fleeing from the weapons of Jove and exiled from his lost realm. He gathered together the unruly race, scattered over mountain heights, and gave them laws, and chose that the land be called Latium, since in these borders he had found a safe hiding-place [from the Latin verb *latere*]. Under his reign were the golden ages men tell of: in such perfect peace he ruled the nations; till little by little then crept in a race of worse sort and duller hue, the frenzy of war, and the passion for gain.

And before the final triumph of Aeneas, Juno, Aeneas's implacable enemy, will yield to destiny, but will request this from Jove: "command not the native Latins to change their ancient name, nor to become Trojans and be called Teucrians, nor to change their tongue and alter their attire: let Latium be, let Alban kings endure through ages, let be a Roman stock, strong in Italian valour: fallen is Troy, and fallen let her be, together with her name." Jove will grant Juno's wish, and Rome's future will be secure. Under Caesar Augustus the reign of peace will begin anew.

But is all this sufficient to account for the composition of the great Roman epic poem? Is *this* the myth of the *Aeneid*? Have we not overlooked a crucial point in the very conception of the poem, to wit, that the epic poem itself, while embodying a myth, cannot help reflecting the age it belongs to? But are not the great cosmic cycles, the αἰῶνες, identical? Do not in each of them the Argo, and Troy, and Caesar reappear? It is with respect to this point that a Platonic myth becomes of utmost importance to Virgil. It can be found in Plato's dialogue *The Statesman*.

The interlocutors in this dialogue are the Stranger from Elea and a young man, a namesake of Socrates. The Stranger tells a myth:

During a certain epoch god himself goes with the universe as guide in its revolving course, but at another epoch, when the cycles have at length reached the measure of the allotted time, he lets it go, and of its own accord it turns backwards in the opposite direction, since it is a living being and is endowed with intelligence by him who fashioned it in the beginning.

Thus, we read further, "the universe is guided at one time by an extrinsic divine cause, acquiring the power of living again and receiving renewed immortality from the divine artisan, and at another time it is left to itself and then moves by its own motion . . ." Young Socrates asks: "But was the life in the reign of Kronos . . . in that previous period of revolution or in ours?" The Stranger answers:

No, the life about which you ask, when all the fruits of the earth sprang up of their own accord for men, did not belong at all to the present period of revolution, but this also belonged to the previous one. For them, in the beginning, god ruled and supervised the whole revolution, and so again, in the same way, all the parts of the universe were divided by regions among gods who ruled them, and, moreover, the animals were distributed by species and flocks among inferior deities as divine shepherds, each of whom was in all respect the independent guardian of the creatures under his own care, so that no creature was wild, nor did they eat one another, and there was no war among them, nor any strife whatsoever.

The Stranger goes on to describe how god himself was the shepherd of man in that age.

And under his care there were no states, nor did men possess wives or children; for they all came to life again out of the earth, with no recollection of their

former lives. So there were no states or families, but they had fruits in plenty from the trees and other plants, which the earth furnished them of its own accord, without help from agriculture. And they lived for the most part in the open air, without clothing or bedding; for the climate was tempered for their comfort, and the abundant grass that grew up out of the earth furnished them soft couches. That, Socrates, was the life of men in the reign of Kronos; but the life of the present age, which is said to be the age of Zeus, you know by your own experience.

The Stranger summarizes his tale in the following way:

Now as long as the world was nurturing the animals within itself under the guidance of the Pilot, it produced little evil and great good; but in becoming separated from him it always got on most excellently during the time immediately after it was let go, but as time went on and it grew forgetful, the ancient condition of disorder prevailed more and more and towards the end of the time reached its height, and the universe, mingling but little good with much of the opposite sort, was in danger of destruction for itself and those within it. Therefore at that moment the god, who made the order of the universe, perceived that it was in dire trouble, and fearing that it might founder in the tempest of confusion and sink in the boundless sea of diversity, he took again his place as its helmsman, reversed whatever had become unsound and unsettled in the previous period when the world was left to itself, set the world in order, restored it and made it immortal and ageless.

This is the myth of the Stranger in Plato's *Statesman*, of which I have read to you only a small part. It changes the old myth of the cosmic cycles, which repeat themselves and remain identical, in a significant way. Diagrammatically this can be shown as follows:

Old pattern:



Platonic pattern:



The identity of the cycles in the Platonic pattern is, as it were, intermittent. And the reversal of the direction can be best seen at the beginnings of two consecutive cycles. What is important for us to see is this: to be able to accomplish his work, Virgil has to adopt this Platonic myth and to disregard its highly comical and self-refuting context. This adoption determines the composition of the *Aeneid* and, by implication, Virgil's true relation to Homer. The age of Homer is the age of Zeus, an age characterized by calamitous expeditions, disastrous wars, anarchical diversity. Its beginning is reflected in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, its climax reached in the Punic wars. The content of the Homeric poems has to be understood as a derived one. What underlies this content is the reversal of the preceding age of Kronos. Virgil's epic of Rome will have to reverse this reversal. It cannot avoid reproducing the main features and the single episodes of the Greek work, but it will reverse their order, shift the

emphasis in them, exchange the nature and the rôle of the leading personages; for the age of Jove is but a mirror-image of the age of Saturn. Does that mean that Virgil is bound to imitate Homer? No, on the contrary, it is Homer who cannot help imitating Virgil or, if you please, cannot help imitating the epic poet of the preceding Saturnian age, who is identical with Virgil. That is why there has to be so much unfaithful resemblance between the *Aeneid* and Homer's work. Virgil's own relation to the epic poem of the preceding age constitutes, it seems to me, Virgil's myth of the *Aeneid*. This is what he must have meant when he declared that it was easier to steal the club of Hercules and the trident of Neptune than to steal a verse from Homer. A poet of the god-led Saturnian age is incapable of stealing verses from a Jovian poet, however excellent this Jovian poet may be.

It might be objected that the Platonic myth, as a Greek myth, adopted by Virgil, is itself a product of the Jovian age. I venture to think that Virgil considered words of sages, words of philosophers as not subjugated to the dominion of the age in which these words were uttered, just as Tartarus and Elysium are outside the sway of the ages. It may be worth while to report to you what an unknown hand has inscribed into a manuscript of Donatus's Life of Virgil (Donatus himself wrote in the fourth century A.D.): ". . . although he [Virgil] seems to have put the opinions of diverse philosophers into his writings with most serious intent, he himself was a devotee of the Academy; for he preferred Plato's views to all the others."

Let me sketch briefly the way the reversal of the Jovian order is accomplished in Virgil's poem. First of all, the *Odyssey* precedes the *Iliad* here, as every commentator since Servius has remarked. But, as we shall see in a moment, the first six books, which correspond to the *Odyssey*, still belong to the old Homeric age. When Aeneas and his men arrive in Carthage, they face a bas-relief on the temple of Juno which depicts the Trojan war and all the events described in the *Iliad*. Their past is before them. But this past also casts a shadow on Aeneas' sojourn in Carthage. Aeneas falls in love with Dido, who corresponds to both Calypso and Circe and resembles both Medea and Cleopatra. Aeneas' passion for this woman shows his lingering affinity to the Jovian age, to which Carthage itself, Rome's eternal foe, belongs. A violent separation from Dido becomes necessary, a separation consummated only in Elysium, when the golden bough, the gift to Proserpine, is planted by Aeneas on the threshold of the land of joy, the abode of the blest in the nether world. There, in Elysium, Aeneas sees the shade of his *father*, while Odysseus, in Hades, meets the shade of his *mother*. There Aeneas is shown by Anchises the *future* of Rome, while Odysseus, in Hades, is told of the past and the present, except for the prophecy of the seer Teiresias. When Aeneas is leaving Elysium, a decisive event occurs, challenging our imagination. I quoted earlier the passage in the 19th book of the *Odyssey* and the corresponding passage at the end of the 6th book of the *Aeneid* about the two gates of sleep, one of horn through which true dreams pass and one of ivory through which false

visions and shades issue forth. Anchises dismisses the Sibyl and Aeneas by *the ivory gate* (*portaque emittit eburna*). How shall we understand these words? Is Aeneas, the pious Aeneas, led on by divine power, a false dream? Is the grandeur of Rome, Aeneas's treasure and burden, a melancholy illusion? Or do not these words, uttered at the very center of the poem, rather symbolize a cosmic reversal in the structure of the universe, marking the transition from the age of Jove to the reign of Saturn? In Greek, the words for "horn" and for "ivory" are attuned to the meaning of "fulfilment" and of "deception." Not so in Latin. Aeneas emerges from the nether world a changed man. A re-birth has taken place. *His* passing through the gate of ivory transmutes *its* function. From now on the poem changes its character, too. As the poet himself says: "Greater is the order of things that opens before me; greater is the task I essay."

The task is greater indeed. The poem has to describe the beginning of the golden age. This beginning is marred by the inherited features of the preceding one, the iron one. Violence and fury will display themselves. Under Turnus's leadership, Amata's predilections and Juno's help, the Latins and their allies will oppose the Trojans, aided by the Arcadians and Etruscans. A new Trojan war will rage in a reversed order. This time it will end with the victory of Aeneas, the new Hector, over Turnus, the new Achilles. After this victory there will be reconciliation between the Trojans and the Latins according to the terms agreed on by Jove and Juno. There will be reconciliation between Jove and Saturn, too. From then on Rome will begin its tumultuous ascent, until she reaches the height of Augustean peace.

The tradition has it that Virgil, when he had finished (or almost finished) writing the *Aeneid*, wanted to burn all he had written. Augustus himself is said to have prevented this from happening. We may surmise that Virgil knew this much about his myth: its truth depended on the actual destiny of Rome. And, prophet that he was, he foresaw the future *pax romana*, the future Roman peace, more often than not immersed in a sea of corruption, of monstrous crimes and dismal anarchy. We should be grateful to Augustus, though. For even if the gate of ivory may have preserved its Homeric character, the nobility of Virgil's attempt and the boldness of his mythical vision make us bow our heads and raise our minds.