

NICHOLAS HORSFALL

Exempla in Virgil's Underworld

Summary – In *Aeneid* 6, Hercules and Dionysus point towards the deification of Augustus; the mythological poets amply scattered through Elysium may be there to launch a sense that Virgil too will one day tread those very same meadows as a reward for his service as poet to the state. And the great Romans of the 'Heldenschau'? There as *exempla* to help persuade first Aeneas and secondly the Roman reader to shoulder the various burdens of the *res publica*.

Fifty years and more ago, in a standard, national examination, taken when I was fifteen, I had to study, in some detail, *Aeneid* 6. There was an element of common sadism in the choice of text, or so it appeared, for the book was full of proper names, mythological and Roman, and without ever really knowing why the names were there in the text, we were expected to memorise one or two relevant facts about each. A simple, but not a small, exercise in memorisation.¹ *Labuntur anni*, and my own overweight commentary on that book and those names has appeared (n. 1). It was a great help, while writing that commentary, to be able to talk about problems in *Aeneid* 6 to university audiences, and several articles appeared as a result. I refer in particular to (A) "Poets and poetry in Virgil's Underworld," *Vergilius* 59 (2013), 23–28. I talked about those poets at Parma in the autumn of 2013, and Prof. Gilberto Biondi's exceptionally acute reaction led to another paper, (B), "Poetic immortality and Virgil's Elysium," which he very fairly claimed for *Paideia*, forthcoming. I have also been chasing through my memory and notes an idea, (C), mislaid while writing my commentary, about the heroes who preceded Aeneas in descending to the Underworld.

It was clearly high time to orchestrate (A), (B), and (C), not least because there is no article on *exempla* either in the *Enciclopedia virgiliana* or in the new Virgil encyclopedia, nor indeed any discussion in Gilbert Highet's still-useful *The speeches in Vergil's Aeneid* (Princeton 1972). To 'genealogical

¹ For what it was like to read *Aeneid* 6 in the early, middle, and late 1960s, see Appendix 1 to my commentary on that book (2 vols., Berlin 2013), 2, 631–633.

protreptic' we shall have to return; that is a definition about which I have written sparsim since 1976,² but I doubt that I should ever have continued to try to clarify Virgil's use of mythological and historical names but for a typically formidable article by Antonio La Penna,³ which showed what could be done with those endless lists (or at least with some of the details). Why were they there? Let me first try to summarise selectively the argument of (A) and (B), supra, and then pass to the strikingly similar case of (C).

Now that La Penna has shown that Hercules at 6, 801 – 803 and Dionysus at 6, 804/805 both point towards Augustus' eventual deification, the next step was small enough, to identify the mythological poets present in Elysium. I listed ("Poets and poetry", 26) 6, 644 *plaudunt choreas et carmina dicunt*, 645 – 647 Orpheus in person singing, 657 *laetumque choro paeana canentis*, 662 *quique pii vates et Phoebos digna locuti* and 667 Musaeus, one of the chief poets of the mythological world. Elysium proves to contain a remarkable concentration of poet-singers (two named; three other passages; all within 24 lines). More important even than the fact is the explanation. First, the need to show that Elysium was a goal attainable by any poet who has rendered good service.⁴ To humanity? To his calling? To the *res publica*? That may become a little clearer. This view of the poet and of poetry is of course familiar from the late Horace (*carm.* 4 and CS); never should we forget the indissoluble bond that links Livius Andronicus' hymn of 207BC and Horace's *carmen* of 17. So Virgil suggests the greatest of rewards (eternal bliss after all) for the greatest of poets. Might he even imply obliquely, subtly, delicately that he writes himself in the expectation of Elysium? The argument seems to be present, but that does not mean that we are meant to see it as recognisable, active, significant in the text.

Now before we turn to (C), the argument from exempla as applied to the ability of a very few heroes to descend to the Underworld and to return thence to the world above, we do need to look briefly, (B), at the exemplary aspect of Virgil's *Heldenschau*.

² "Virgil, history and the Roman tradition", *Prudentia* 8 (1976), 84 with n. 102, A companion to the study of Virgil (ed. NH, Leiden 1995; repr. *ibid.*, n.d. [2000]), 144, *Aeneid* 6, 514. The definition is my own, and it really should not have been appropriated unacknowledged, D. C. Feeney, *PCPS* 32 (1986), 1.

³ "Considerazioni sulla divinizzazione degli eroi" in: *Hommages a Henri Le Bonniec. Res sacrae*, ed. D. Porte, J.-P. Néraudeau, Coll. Lat. 201 (Bruxelles 1988), 275–287, on the mythological precedents employed by the Augustan poets to hint at the future deification of Augustus. See further below. See now my n. on 6, 801 – 803.

⁴ See above all 6, 662, supra; note too *PEG* 2, 2, 717, 103f. Bernabé: there are poets in the Orphic paradise too. Is Virgil's argument here tinged with Orphism? Maybe.

It has long been recognised that there is a close affinity between Virgil's choice of names in the Parade and the names so often paraded by Cicero in his choice of historical exempla.⁵ Norden, inevitably, went straight to the point in his own Greek (Aen. 6⁴, p. 313): λόγος παραινετικός (προτρεπτικός, συμβουλευτικός). The exemplary force of historical names was to some degree familiar even to Cicero's popular audience.⁶ Can these same names possibly not have had an exemplary function in the Aeneid? And if they do indeed have such a function in the Aeneid, can the reader risk not pausing for a moment to consider with some care what that function might be? Now 'genealogical protreptic' was a lofty definition, in, I hoped, the tradition of Norden, but it was and has remained till now bound to three significant classical texts about the exemplary function of historical names: I refer to Plb. 6, 53, 10, Cic. rep. 6, 13, and Sall. Iug. 4, 5.⁷ But it would be quite misleading to limit ourselves to a mere three texts, for this way of presenting and employing historical names turns out to be deeply and widely rooted in Roman ways of thinking about the past. I offer a further five passages in support, increasingly confident that yet more could easily enough be found:

(i) the Scipionic elogia: ILS 4 *facile facteis superasses gloriam maiorum*, ILS 6 *virtutes generis meis moribus accumulavi*.⁸

(ii) The *carmina antiqua* sung by *pueri modesti*, in *quibus laudes erant maiorum*.⁹

(iii) Verg. Buc. 4, 26f.: the *puer ac simul heroum laudes et facta parentis/ iam legere et quae sit poteris cognoscere virtus*.¹⁰

(iv) Men. Rhet. 421, 31f. Sp. τοὺς δὲ παῖδας ζηλοῦν τὰς τοῦ πατρὸς ἀρετάς; at Aen. 6, 2, 517, n. 1, I cite, after Russell and Wilson, Thuc. 2, 45, 1. In the funeral oration, according to Menander, the speaker advises the children of the deceased to imitate the virtues of their father.

(v) Aug. edicta fr. xiii Malc. (the intent of the statues in the Forum of Augustus); cf. Companion (n. 2), 145: *ut ad illorum (...) velut ad exemplar et ipse, dum viveret, et insequentium aetatium principes exigerentur a civibus*.

⁵ Summarised, Aen. 6, 2, 516f.

⁶ Discussed in my Culture of the Roman plebs (London 2003), 88–93.

⁷ "Poets and poetry," 27 with n.19, after Companion, 145, and Aen. 6, 2, 517.

⁸ "Virgil, history ...," 84, n. 101; for exceeding the deeds of your ancestors, cf. also Rhet. Her. 3, 13. Note good discussion, H. Roloff, *Maiores bei Cicero* (diss. Göttingen 1938), 22ff.

⁹ Varr. de vit. fr. 84 Riposati, with my remarks, Riv. Fil. 122 (1994), 70–75; see too Hermathena 181 (2006), 251 for some comment on recent work.

¹⁰ "Virgil, history ...," 84; see now Cucchiarelli's note.

The Romans at large are presented to Aeneas as *tuos*: 6, 788f. *hanc aspice gentem / Romanosque tuos*, as Aeneas himself is (12, 166) *Romanae stirpis origo*. Aeneas is the Stammvater not only of the *gens Iulia* but of the *gens Romana*, though Virgil advances no detailed case for the latter point. But the ‘genealogical protreptic’ argument is peculiarly relevant here, for it is no arduous task to identify the statements of intent made in the course of Aeneas’ Katabasis.¹¹ But the rhetorical consequence is simple: the future Romans who inhabit the Heldenschau are there in no small measure as exempla, from the future, and not, as conventionally, from the past (in itself a remarkable rhetorical aprosdokēton), to help persuade in the first instance Aeneas as the original viewer of the Parade, and in the second the reader / listener, whether Augustan or modern – at least if the latter will pause long enough to try to make the effort to view the text through a Roman lens, and indeed as a Roman – to help persuade them to share in the common joy at the discovery of Italy, to have the desire to enter anew into human bodies, and become heroes of the Roman state, to spread by means of valour the Trojans’ might¹² and to be fired with desire of the fame to come. In such a case, it is the exemplary function of the names listed that fires Aeneas, and the reader of whichever age, to action, and it may advance our understanding of Aeneid 6 a little if we now ponder this role for the Roman heroes.

So what can be said, lastly (C) of those who preceded Aeneas into the Underworld? Virgil takes much, almost too much care to integrate Aeneas into the select group of those who have visited the Underworld alive: Orpheus, Castor and Pollux, Hercules, Theseus; Pirithous is not relevant to the present argument. Most significant is Virgil’s view of their qualifications for the journey: (i) Jupiter’s benevolence, in some cases but not all, towards his children or descendants;¹³ (ii) exceptional *virtus* (6, 129), with which we might wish to compare 394 *invicti viribus*; (iii) divine descent in itself (as specified at 123, 131 and 394). That gives particular point to the Sibyl’s resonant address to Aeneas at 322 *Anchise generate, deum certissima proles* (he is after all descended from Jupiter both via Venus and via Dardanus and is therefore qualified to return, in the Sibyl’s view). Charon grumbles that he regretted having given passage to Hercules, Theseus, and Pirithous, for all

¹¹ “Poets, poetry ...,” 26; I cite there 717f. *hanc prolem cupio enumerare meorum / quo magis Italia mecum laetere reperta*, 750 *et incipiant in corpora velle reverti*, 806 *et dubitamus adhuc virtute extendere vires*, and 889 *incenditque animum famae venientis amore*.

¹² If I am right to want to read *virtute ... vires* at 6, 806; see my commentary there.

¹³ Cf. my n. on 6, 129 for the relevant genealogies.

that they were *dis geniti atque invicti viribus*. The Sibyl has to explain that Aeneas really is different (6, 399–405), and the manner in which she displays the Golden Bough as his unanswerable claim to passage might seem to suggest that his predecessors have likewise displayed it (see my commentary, 2, 155f.).

The argument from Aeneas' mythological predecessors is essentially different from the other sets of exempla that we have considered, for it is aimed either at the Sibyl or at Charon, and not at Aeneas, nor, at least explicitly, at Virgil's readers. But the method is closely similar. At this point it is surprising to discover how neglected arguments from historical exempla have been in the Virgil bibliography.¹⁴ An inviting topic for a doctoral dissertation, I should have thought.

Nicholas Horsfall
Dalnacroich, Wester Ross

¹⁴ No illumination in the bibliographies of Suerbaum and Holzberg, either. Lausberg's *Handbuch* is quite another matter, but not directly relevant to Virgil. I consulted Servius via PHI and via the Mountford-Schulz index, and also did an electronic search of Tiberius Claudius Donatus, so I add here:

(i) See Aen. 12, 240; cf. my note on Aen. 3, 343.

(ii) See Serv./Serv. Dan. on Aen.1, 39, 200, 242, 731; 6, 119, 121, 122; 7, 304; 8, 374; 9, 134; 11, 258, 276f.

(iii) For Tib. Claud. Don., see 1, 610, 18 Georgii and P. Marshall, *Manuscripta* 37 (1993), 12, line 11 on 6, 119.

