

by close study of it, his elegant signal, *sequentis/ordine respicies*, i.e. 'look at the following in order', corresponds to Aratus' advice to 'look first at the edges'.¹³

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'DON'T DALLY IN THIS VALLEY': WORDPLAY IN *ODYSSEY* 15.10 AND
AENEID 4.271

In Book 4 of the *Aeneid*, Iarbas, a Libyan king and a son of Jupiter, hears the rumour of the alliance between Dido and Aeneas. Angered at having been scorned by Dido in favour of a foreigner, he complains bitterly in a prayer to his father. Jupiter responds by sending Mercury down to urge Aeneas to leave Carthage and proceed on his mission to found a kingdom in Italy. Mercury finds Aeneas decked out in the fancy dress of an eastern prince, supervising a building programme for Dido. He scolds Aeneas for wasting time in Carthage and neglecting his ultimate task. Thus brought to his senses, Aeneas prepares to depart (4.196–295).

The primary Homeric model for this sequence is Zeus' dispatch of Hermes to Calypso in the *Odyssey* (5.1–262).¹ The similarities are clear. Mercury, sent by Jupiter after Iarbas' prayer, is the analogue of Hermes, sent by Zeus in response to Athena's complaint that Odysseus is languishing with Calypso. The descriptions of the preparations of Hermes and Mercury for departure are similar (putting on sandals, taking up the wand). Most striking of all, each god interrupts his flight with a stop on a mountain (Hermes pauses on Pieria, *Od.* 5.50; Mercury on Atlas, *Aen.* 4.246–53), and both are likened to birds (*Od.* 5.51–4; *Aen.* 4.253–5).² Finally, both gods bring messages that put an end to an amorous relationship that stands in the way of the hero's progress.³

There are, however, important differences between the two situations. Calypso has been keeping Odysseus on the island of Ogygia against his will.⁴ Aeneas, by contrast, has become a willing and active partner in building Dido's city. Hermes commands Calypso to let Odysseus leave, whereas Mercury chastises not Dido, but Aeneas himself.⁵ The contrast between the situations of Odysseus and Aeneas is well summed up when Mercury calls Aeneas *uxorius*. Odysseus sits dejected by the shore (*Od.* 5.156–8), while Aeneas actively constructs an alternative future around the Carthaginian queen (*Aen.* 4.259–67). Mercury's task in confronting Aeneas,

¹³ Note also that Virgil's acrostic is placed in between the horns of the moon, *cornu* (428) ... *cornibus* (433).

¹ G. Knauer, *Die Aeneis und Homer* (Göttingen, 1964), 209–14, 386–7; F. Klingner, *Virgil: Bucolica, Georgica, Aeneis* (Zürich, 1967), 445; W. Kühn, *Götterszenen bei Vergil* (Heidelberg, 1970), 68–70; E. L. Harrison, 'Virgil's Mercury', in A. G. McKay, *Vergilian Bimillenary Lectures 1982, Vergilius*, suppl. vol. 2 (Vancouver, 1984), 1–47, at 16; D. Feeney, 'Leaving Dido', in M. Burden, *A Woman Scorn'd: Responses to the Dido Myth* (London, 1998), 105–27, at 114; D. Nelis, *Virgil's Aeneid and the Argonautica of Apollonius Rhodius* (Leeds, 2001), 156–7; W. Clausen, *Virgil's Aeneid: Decorum, Allusion, and Ideology* (Munich, 2002), 83–4, n. 23.

² Knauer, *ibid.*, 210, n. 1; Harrison, *ibid.*, 16.

³ Harrison (n. 1), 16.

⁴ Knauer (n. 1), 214; Clausen (n. 1), 83–4, n. 23.

⁵ Knauer (n. 1), 209, 214; Harrison (n. 1), 16; Feeney (n. 1), 114; Nelis (n. 1), 157.

therefore, is different from Hermes' when he faces Calypso. In light of the differences in the situations, it is reasonable to ask whether Virgil, in composing Mercury's confrontation of Aeneas, recalled an additional episode from epic that would fit the circumstances more closely, a scene in which a deity warns the hero himself not to neglect his mission and urges him to be on his way.

At the opening of *Odyssey* 15, Telemachus is tarrying at the palace of Menelaus in Sparta. Athena appears to Telemachus as he lies awake at night to urge him to go home, where the suitors are destroying his property. Her address to him begins thus (15.10–13):

Τηλέμαχ', οὐκέτι καλὰ δόμων ἄπο τῆλ' ἀλάλησαι,
κτῆματά τε προλιπὼν ἄνδρας τ' ἐν σοῖσι δόμοισιν
οὕτω ὑπερφιάλους· μή τοι κατὰ πάντα φάγῳσι
κτῆματα δασσάμενοι, σὺ δὲ τηυσίην ὁδὸν ἔλθης.

Athena's first line rings with a pun on Telemachus' name, Τηλέμαχ' ... τῆλ', rendered by W. H. D. Rouse into English prose as follows:

'Don't dally in this valley, Telemachos, I tell'ee!' Remember your estates and the bullies in your house! They will eat everything up among them, while you are wasting your pains on this journey.⁶

Telemachus has heard these lines before. At *Odyssey* 3.313–16 Nestor uses them to urge Telemachus to hasten on to Sparta in order to inquire of Odysseus' fate from Menelaus. The wordplay, however, is absent, since Nestor uses a different half-line to introduce his admonishment: καὶ σὺ, φίλος, μὴ δηθὰ δόμων ἄπο τῆλ' ἀλάλησο (3.313). Athena creates a pun by using Telemachus' name in the opening of her address to him.

Homer's wordplay inspired Virgil to put a similar jingle into Mercury's speech to Aeneas. The messenger begins his address to the hero as follows (4.265–71):

tu nunc Karthaginis altae
fundamenta locas pulchramque uxorius urbem
extruis? heu, regni rerumque oblite tuarum!
ipse deum tibi me claro demittit Olympo
regnator, caelum et terras qui numine torquet,
ipse haec ferre iubet celeris mandata per auras:
quid struis? aut qua spe Libycis teris otia terris?

Virgil's *teris* ... *terris* in 4.271 is an imitation of Homer's Τηλέμαχ' ... τῆλ'. That Virgil is playing with words here has long been evident, but has not been taken seriously. For example, one reads in Conington and Nettleship: 'Cerde, remarking on "teris—terris", thinks that Virg. intended to allude to the etymology of "terra" from "terere". *This is of course absurd*' (italics mine).⁷ The commentators admit, however, that 'the jingle can hardly have been unintentional', and they compare 4.238, *parere parabat*, 10.191–2, *canit* ... *canentem* and 10.417–18 *canens* ... *canentia*.

⁶ W. H. D. Rouse, *The Odyssey: The Story of Odysseus* (Edinburgh, 1937), 169. Rouse's translation has been noted in a survey of Homeric wordplay by L. P. Rank, *Etymologiseering en Verwante Verschijnselen bij Homerus* (Assen, 1951), 71, n. 146. For another notice of the wordplay, see J. O'Hara, *True Names: Vergil and the Alexandrian Tradition of Etymological Wordplay* (Ann Arbor, 1996), 9 and n. 19. Commentaries have neglected it.

⁷ J. Conington, *The Works of Virgil with a Commentary* (London, 1883–4), ii.287 ad loc. 'Cerde' is Juan Luis de la Cerda, whose annotated edition of Virgil was first published in Madrid in 1608. La Cerda's comment on this passage is also cited in the notes to the Delphin Classics edition of Virgil (London, 1819), vi.2793, ad loc.

That Virgil made use of paronomasia is undeniable.⁸ Nor should the observation that 'of course, *teris* and *terris* would not have been pronounced alike' make us hesitate.⁹ Differences in the pronunciation of single versus double consonants are no obstacle to wordplay.¹⁰ Moreover, La Cerda's suggestion is not at all absurd. Aelius Stilo proposed the etymology of *terra* from *terere*, and Varro himself endorsed it.¹¹ As has been pointed out, Varro's etymological speculations had considerable influence on Virgil and his contemporaries.¹² It was probably not a purely antiquarian interest in etymology, however, that led Virgil to play on *terere* and *terra* here, but rather the presence of a pun in Homer in a similar situation.

The following considerations argue in favour of *teris otia terris* as an imitation of Homer's pun:

1. *τηλ* and *ter* are similar sounds.
2. Both puns appear in admonishments from a deity to a hero not to neglect an important responsibility elsewhere. Telemachus must not forget his *κτήματα*, which are in danger of being consumed by the suitors. Corresponding to Telemachus' *κτήματα* is Aeneas' future kingdom, his *regnum* and *res* (*heu, regni rerumque oblite tuarum*), which will not be established if he lingers in Carthage.
3. Both sounds appear in words that suggest how the hero is out of place; *τηλ* 'far', with the pun suggesting, in effect, 'Telemachus, you are *far* from where you need to be'; the *ter* in *teris* and *terris* suggests 'you are *wasting time*, Aeneas, on *land*, when you should be at sea'. Virgil's *teris otia*, a variation of *tempus terere*,¹³ also picks up the temporal urgency of Homer's *οὐκέτι*.¹⁴
4. Both wordplays appear in emphatic positions. Homer's wordplay appears in Athena's first line. Although the wordplay does not occur in Mercury's first line, it does appear in the first line of Jupiter's message as rendered by Mercury.

Jupiter originally asks *aut qua spe inimica in gente moratur . . . ?* (4.235), a question that would have mystified Aeneas, who lacks Jupiter's knowledge of the later enmity between Carthage and Rome.¹⁵ Mercury's substitution, *aut qua spe Lybicus teris otia*

⁸ For a discussion of paronomasia in Virgil and a list of examples, including *Aen.* 4.271, see O'Hara (n. 6), 60–2 and n. 316.

⁹ R. G. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Quartus* (Oxford, 1963), 91. The same view appears in A. S. Pease, *Publi Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Quartus* (Cambridge, 1935), 266 ad loc.

¹⁰ See F. Ahl, *Metaformations* (Ithaca, 1985), 57.

¹¹ Varro, *De ling. lat.* 5.21: *Terra dicta ab eo, ut Aelius scribit, quod teritur*. See Ahl (ibid.), 31, 57, 282; R. Maltby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies* (Leeds, 1991), 605 s.v. *terra*; O'Hara (n. 6), 155.

¹² For discussion and references see O'Hara (n. 6), 48 with n. 269.

¹³ See Pease (n. 9), 266 ad loc.

¹⁴ Apollonius of Rhodes puts Thetis' address to Peleus at 4.856 in language that recalls Athena's admonishment of Telemachus and looks forward to Mercury's castigation of Aeneas: *μηκέτι νῦν ἄκταις Τυρσησίωιν ἦσθε μένοντες*. Nelis has plausibly catalogued Thetis' words as a model for Mercury's lines (n. 1), 157, 464. To Nelis' discussion I would add that the phrase *ἄκταις Τυρσησίωιν* nicely corresponds to *Lybicus...terris*. It is likely that Apollonius too is recalling the opening of *Odyssey* 15. Thetis' *μηκέτι* corresponds to Athena's *οὐκέτι*. Apollonius may also be toying with imitating Homer's wordplay in Thetis' first line: *μηκέτι . . . μένοντες*. By juxtaposing assonant elements, as Roman poets often do, Virgil has brought the wordplay into higher relief. Compare *parere parabat* in *Aen.* 4.238, noted by Conington (n. 7) and Nettleship.

¹⁵ R. D. Williams, *The Aeneid of Vergil* (London, 1972, 2 vols), i.355 ad 4.271; Ahl (n. 10), 282; G. Highet, *The Speeches in Vergil's Aeneid* (1972), 124, suggests rather that Mercury

terris? (4.271), is part of a conscious rhetorical strategy, the assonance providing brisk emphasis to the message, just as Athena's wordplay adds urgency to her admonishment of Telemachus.

Are there other reasons why Virgil would have seen something of Telemachus in Aeneas here? Implied parallels between Aeneas and Telemachus later in the *Aeneid* have been noted.¹⁶ The key here is the theme of father and son, a theme that would plausibly have led Virgil to see correspondences and telling contrasts between the situations of Telemachus and Aeneas. Telemachus is on a quest for his father and, in a larger sense, his own identity. When Athena appears to Telemachus, he is having a bout with insomnia. Thoughts of his father keep him awake.¹⁷ Aeneas, on the other hand, is in effect running away from his mission, for which his father, Anchises, had been the polestar. Book 3 ends with Aeneas telling of the loss of his father in Sicily (3.708–13), and Book 5 quickly brings a reaffirmation of filial duty in the sacrifice and games (5.31, 5.42ff.). In Book 4, however, Anchises recedes into the background, and Aeneas loses direction.¹⁸ He nearly loses his identity. The foreign garb in which Mercury finds him symbolizes his precarious state.¹⁹ Aeneas cannot escape his father, however. When explaining his sudden change of heart to Dido, just before he tells her about Mercury's message, Aeneas alludes to the dreams that torment his sleep (4.351–3):

me patris Anchisae, quotiens umentibus umbris
nox operit terras, quotiens astra ignea surgunt,
admonet in somnis et turbida terret imago.

Fathers provide the insomnia and the nightmares. Wordplays from the gods awaken and jolt our heroes into action.²⁰

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himself does not know what Jupiter means by *inimica in gente*; cf. also Feeney (n. 1), 20. It should not be forgotten, however, that Carthage was hostile to outsiders before Mercury was sent to put them in a receptive frame of mind (*Aen.* 1.297–304). Aeneas, of course, would have been ignorant of their original disposition as well.

¹⁶ Especially in Book 8, where Aeneas' embassy to Evander recalls Telemachus' journey to Pylos. See M. Petrini, *The Child and the Hero* (Ann Arbor, 1997), 51–2; Knauer (n. 1), 249–55; Klingner (n. 1), 529–34.

¹⁷ *Od.* 15.7–8: Τηλέμαχον δ' οὐχ ὕπνος ἔχε γλυκὺς, ἀλλ' ἐνὶ θυμῷ νύκτα δι' ἀμβροσίην μελεδήματα πατρὸς ἔγειρεν.

¹⁸ See Williams (n. 15), 331 *ad* 3.708 ff., '... certainly Virgil could not have conceived Book 4 in its present form, with Aeneas staying with Dido forgetful of fate, if Anchises had still been alive'. See also S. Wiltshire, *Public and Private in Vergil's Aeneid* (Amherst, 1989), 76: 'As long as his father was alive, Aeneas was growing slowly into his public role. He still wants a city, but now any city will do, even one defined by someone else'. One may also compare the view of father son relations often seen in Roman comedy, where the young man's morality is tested when the supervision of the father is removed. See Terence's *Andria* 51–4.

¹⁹ See Klingner (n. 1), 448, who notes that Aeneas is 'der ... fast schon zum Karthager gewordene'. Mercury's function is essentially to awaken Aeneas from this dream-state; cf. Feeney's remark on Mercury's control over sleep, to which Virgil alludes in 4.244 (*dat somnos adimitque*): 'Metaphorically, Mercury will soon wake up Aeneas from his sleep, and literally he will do the same thing in his second visitation' (n. 1), 113.

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