

## GORGONS AND GHOSTS: EXITING THE UNDERWORLD IN HOMER AND VIRGIL

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**Key words:** *Homer, Virgil, Odysseus, Aeneas, Gorgons, Medusa, Gates of Sleep.*

**Abstract:** *Close study of the close of the underworld passages in both Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid* reveals the influence of Homer's Gorgon imagery on Virgil's depiction of his hero's infernal exploits, and helps to illustrate a new interpretation for the enigma of the Ivory Gate.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *Homer, Vergiliu, Odiseu, Enea, Gorgona, Medusa, Porțile Somnului.*

**Rezumat: Gordone și fantome: ieșirea din lumea infernală în Homer și Vergiliu.** *Studiul atent al încheierii pasajelor despre lumea de dincolo atât în *Odiseea* lui Homer, cât și în *Eneida* lui Vergiliu dezvăluie influența imaginilor Gorgonei ale lui Homer asupra descrierii de către Virgil a isprăvilor infernale ale eroului său și ajută la ilustrarea unei noi interpretări a enigmei Porții de Fildes.*

At the end of Odysseus' *katabasis* at the close of Homer's *Odyssey* 11, the hero wishes to see more souls of great worthies after his encounter with the *εἶδωλον* of Heracles, but his hope is dashed when he confronts the fear that Persephone may appear with the head of the Gorgon. Terrified souls herald the possible approach of the dread monster. At once, Odysseus takes his leave of the region of the underworld and returns to his vessel and his men (11.628-640):<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Passages from the *Odyssey* are quoted from M. L. West, ed., *Homerus: *Odyssea**, Berlin-Boston, Walter de Gruyter, 2017 (*Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum*). For commentary on the underworld verses see especially A.

αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν αὐτοῦ μένον ἔμπεδον, εἴ τις ἔτ' ἔλθοι  
 ἀνδρῶν ἠρώων, οἳ δὴ τὸ πρόσθεν ὄλοντο.  
 630 καὶ νῦ κ' ἔτι προτέρους ἴδον ἀνέρας, οὓς ἔθελόν περ,  
 Θησέα Πειρίθοόν τε, θεῶν ἐρικυδέα τέκνα:  
 ἀλλὰ πρὶν ἐπὶ ἔθνε' ἀγείρετο μυρία νεκρῶν  
 ἠχῆ θεσπεσίη: ἐμὲ δὲ χλωρὸν δέος ἦρει,  
 635 μῆ μοι Γοργεῖην κεφαλὴν δεινοῖο πελώρου  
 ἐξ Αἰδέω πέμψειεν ἀγαυὴ Περσεφόνηα.  
 αὐτίκ' ἔπειτ' ἐπὶ νῆα κιῶν ἐκέλευον ἑταίρους  
 αὐτοὺς τ' ἀμβαίνειν ἀνά τε πρυμνήσια λῦσα.  
 οἳ δ' αἴψ' εἰσβαῖνον καὶ ἐπὶ κληῖσι καθίζον.  
 640 τὴν δὲ κατ' Ὀκεανὸν ποταμὸν φέρε κῦμα ῥόοιο,  
 πρῶτα μὲν εἰρεσίη, μετέπειτα δὲ κάλλιμος οὔρος.

Odysseus is worried that Persephone may send up the head of the dread Gorgon, i.e., Medusa.<sup>2</sup> His departure from the scene is hasty (636 *αὐτίκ' ἔπειτ' ἐπὶ νῆα κιῶν*) on account of his fear (633 *ἐμὲ δὲ χλωρὸν δέος ἦρει*). The powerful evocation of Gorgon imagery at the close of Odysseus' *katabasis* has inspired significant reflection and philosophical commentary across the ages. Already in Plato's *Symposium* Socrates could playfully express the fear that Agathon might send forth the head of Gorgias to reduce him to petrified speechlessness.<sup>3</sup>

Why Persephone should be depicted as if she wished to threaten to send forth the Gorgon head is not clarified by the poet. It may be significant that immediately before this fear is expressed, Odysseus is said to have wanted to see the shades of Theseus and Pirithous (11.630-1),<sup>4</sup> who were imprisoned in the underworld because they

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Heubeck and A. Hoekstra, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey, Volume II, Books IX-XVI*, Oxford, 1990, *ad loc.*

<sup>2</sup> On certain implications of the threat of the perhaps disembodied head, see R. Janes, *Losing Our Heads: Beheadings in Literature and Culture*, New York-London, New York University Press, 2005, 27. For the idea that "Odysseus fears that Persephone will send another woman from the female-dominated *Ehoiai*", given that Medusa was a heroine violated by Poseidon, see I. Ziogas, *Ovid and Hesiod: The Metamorphosis of the Catalogue of Women*, Cambridge, 2013, 86.

<sup>3</sup> *Symposium* 198c.

<sup>4</sup> For how Virgil will tell what Homer does not (cf. *Aeneid* 6.617-618), see D. Quint, *Virgil's Double Cross: Design and Meaning in the Aeneid*, Princeton, 2018, 85, n. 6. The question of whether or not the detail about the hero of Athens

had sought to assault Persephone.<sup>5</sup> Mention of the would-be assailants of the goddess comes just before the perceived threat of Persephone's Gorgon attack on Odysseus. Odysseus sees a myriad number of frightened shades (632-633 *ἀλλὰ πρὶν ἐπὶ ἔθνε' ἀγείρετο μυρία νεκρῶν / ἠχῆ ἠθεσπεσίη* ...); they serve as the harbinger of the potential Gorgon peril. Homer clarifies that Odysseus knew that the dead were terrified because of the sound that the terrified souls uttered (633 *ἠχῆ ἠθεσπεσίη*); the aural warning is the herald of the visual horror that Odysseus seeks to escape. Persephone is the queen of the underworld, and the Gorgon a monster with the conceivable ability to stop a multitude with a glance: the supreme infernal horror for the close of the underworld episode.

Very different is the close of Virgil's account of his protagonist's departure from the lower regions after his final interactions with the shade of his father, in the wake of the Marcellus vignette. Aeneas' exit from the underworld is quiet and peaceful, notwithstanding its haunting implications (*Aeneid* 6.886-901):<sup>6</sup>

890 *sic tota passim regione vagantur  
aeris in campis latis atque omnia lustrant.  
quae postquam Anchises natum per singula duxit  
incenditque animum famae venientis amore,  
exim bella viro memorat quae deinde gerenda,  
Laurentisque docet populos urbemque Latini,  
et quo quemque modo fugiatque feratque laborem.*

895 *Sunt geminae Somni portae, quarum altera fertur  
cornea, qua veris facilis datur exitus umbris,  
altera candenti perfecta nitens elephanto,  
sed falsa ad caelum mittunt insomnia Manes.  
his ibi tum natum Anchises unaque Sibyllam  
prosequitur dictis portaque emittit eburna,  
ille viam secat ad navis sociosque revisit.*

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was added to the text in the Peisistratid recension does not affect the question of Virgil's interpretation of the scene.

<sup>5</sup> I.e., the myth cited by Plato at *Republic* 391c-d; cf. Ps.-Apollodorus, *Bib.* E1.23-4; 2.124; Diodorus 4.26.1; 4.63.4; Aelian, *Var. Hist.* 4.5; Ps.-Hyginus, *Fab.* 79; Seneca, *Phaed.* 93 ff.; Statius, *Theb.* 8.53 ff.

<sup>6</sup> All citations from Virgil's *Aeneid* are taken from G. B. Conte, ed., *Publius Vergilius Maro: Aeneis*, Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2019 (*Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum*) (editio altera).

900 *Tum se ad Caietae recto fert limite portum.  
ancora de prora iacitur; stant litore puppes.*

Much of the scholarly consideration of the end of the sixth *Aeneid* has focused on the celebrated enigma of the *Somni Portae*, in particular the implications of Aeneas' departure from the underworld via the Ivory Gate of false dreams.<sup>7</sup> Less attention has been paid to Virgil's response to his epic predecessor Homer's account of the exit of Odysseus from his place on the threshold of the underworld, specifically to the Homeric introduction of the potential peril of the monstrous horror of the Gorgon.<sup>8</sup> We shall consider closely certain elements of the endings of the underworld episodes in both Homer and Virgil, with an eye to exploring the Augustan poet's response to his archaic predecessor, in particular to the apotropaic force of Gorgon imagery. Along the way, we shall offer a new consideration for the interpretation of the perennial puzzle of the Gates of Sleep, even as we explore how Virgil links his underworld exit scene to other key moments of the poem via purposeful intratextual associations. We shall trace how recurring Gorgon imagery in association with the goddess Pallas Athena/Minerva figures in the poet's presentation of the fate of Aeneas' Troy.

The Gorgon Medusa is mentioned at the close of Odysseus' underworld experience, while in Virgil Gorgons appear at the outset, where they are cited among the monstrous apparitions at the threshold of the lower regions:<sup>9</sup>

*Gorgones, Harpyiaequae; et forma tricorporis umbrae* (6.289)

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<sup>7</sup> There is a full bibliography and detailed treatment of the question by N. Horsfall, *Virgil, Aeneid 6*. Berlin-Boston, Walter de Gruyter, 2013, *ad loc.* The dream gates are borrowed from Homer, *Odyssey* 19.562-569, where Penelope is the speaker as she reflects on her dream of the Odysseus-eagle vanquishing the suitor-geese. She assumes that her dream emitted from the Ivory Gate; the disguised Odysseus assures her that her nocturnal vision was true. In Virgil the narrator describes the gates, and he specifies that Aeneas was sent out via the Ivory.

<sup>8</sup> For an insightful study of the close of *Odyssey* 11, see A. Karanika, *The End of the Nekyia: Odysseus, Heracles, and the Gorgon in the Underworld, Arethusia*, 44/1, 2011, 1-27.

<sup>9</sup> On the quasi-guardian depiction of the Gorgons see R. J. Clark, *The Cerberus-Like Function of the Gorgons in Virgil's Underworld* (Aen. 6.273-94), *CQ*, N.S., 53/1, 2003, 308-309.

Unlike Odysseus, Aeneas is ready to fight these prodigious forms; he must be admonished by the Sibyl that these monsters are but images without substance (6.290-294). We may assume that the mere image of the Gorgon is not enough to petrify a man; Odysseus does not linger to learn if Persephone is bringing forth the real Gorgon head, or a shadow thereof: the hero has no interesting in encountering either Persephone or her Gorgon.

A brief mention of the Gorgons for the start of Aeneas' underworld descent: interestingly, there is a tradition that there were four more verses here, with an expanded description, as it were, of the Gorgon Medusa:

*Gorgonis in medio portentum immane Medusae,  
viperae circum ora comae cui sibila torquent  
infamesque rigent oculi, mentoque sub imo  
serpentum extremis nodantur vincula caudis.* (6.289a-d)

The provenance and history of these lines is uncertain.<sup>10</sup> If Virgil did not compose them, we have no sense as to why or when they were inserted here. If they are authentic, it is uncertain why they were deleted, or by whom (i.e., the poet or his posthumous editors). Only one recent editor prints them in his text.<sup>11</sup> It may be that someone felt that Virgil's underworld needed a greater emphasis on the Gorgon Medusa, given her signal role in the close of Homer's account of Odysseus' visit to the realm of shades (if we may safely assume that the lone Gorgon there is the celebrated *quondam* love of Poseidon and victim of Perseus). There are not that many such disputed passages in the textual tradition of the *Aeneid*; alongside the Helen passage, the Gorgon vignette stands forth as a rare instance of possibly spurious, interpolated lines in Virgil's epic, and quite likely as evidence that someone thought that Medusa merited more attention in the Augustan poet's *nekyia*.

Virgil's Gorgon reference comes at the commencement of his hero's *katabasis*, while Homer's is central to the narrative of his protagonist's exit from the underworld. The Gorgons in Virgil would seem

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<sup>10</sup> See further here Horsfall *ad loc.*; also Y. Gomez Glane, *Virgilio Aen. 6, 289a-d: struttura, composizione, autenticità*, MD, 63, 2009, 175-190.

<sup>11</sup> A. Cussen, *El milenio según Virgilio* (3 vols.), Santiago de Chile, Ediciones Tácitas, 2018.

to offer little more than baleful, monstrous color for an ominous passage, while in Homer the Gorgon is the reason for the end of the hero's tarrying among the dead. Virgil's Gorgons are mere shadows without substance, inconsequential monsters with whom Aeneas is willing to engage in pointless combat; Homer's Gorgon (real or image) constitutes the rationale for his hero's flight from the underworld. Aeneas actually sees the image of the Gorgons (plural, even); Odysseus flees from the possible appearance of the monster, without risking any visual encounter.<sup>12</sup> Given the characteristic petrifying power of Medusa, the flight is understandable enough.

In addition to its key role in the *dénouement* of the underworld, implicit Gorgon imagery figures also in the climactic battle of Odysseus, Telemachus, and their companions against the suitors:

δὴ τότε Ἀθηναίη φθισίμβροτον αἰγίδ' ἀνέσχευ  
ὑπόθεν ἐξ ὀροφῆς: τῶν δὲ φρένες ἐπτοίηθεν. (22.297-298)

Athena raises the aegis, and the suitors are reduced to a state of terror and panic. The connection between Athena's aegis and the Gorgon is Homeric;<sup>13</sup> the name of Medusa is not found in either Homeric epic, and there is no mention of Athena in the underworld allusion to the Gorgon.<sup>14</sup> Virgil too does not name Medusa;<sup>15</sup> he does, however, present the goddess Pallas with the Gorgon aegis as part of his grim picture of the divinities that cooperate in the destruction of Troy.<sup>16</sup> Further, one of the projects that is being attended to in Vulcan's smithy when Venus comes to solicit arms for her son Aeneas is the Gorgon aegis.<sup>17</sup> We might presume perhaps that the aegis needed

<sup>12</sup> With Odysseus' wish to encounter more shades in the underworld we may compare his similar wish to hear the song of the Sirens in *Odyssey* 12.

<sup>13</sup> *Iliad* 5.738-742. The Pseudo-Hesiodic *Shield* (216-237) has an interesting extended description of the aftermath of the slaying of the one (unnamed) Gorgon, with the vivid picture of her fellow Gorgons trying in vain to come to her aid. In that poem's earlier reference to Athena (197-200), the goddess has the aegis, with no mention of any Gorgon connection.

<sup>14</sup> Hesiod knows of Perseus' slaying of Medusa (*Theogony* 270-281).

<sup>15</sup> The "expanded" description of 6.289a-d, with its framing reference at 289a to *Gorgonis... Medusae*, may have been in part an attempt to supply a name that was thought desirable.

<sup>16</sup> *Aeneid* 2.615-616.

<sup>17</sup> *Aeneid* 8.435-438.

repairs after its use in the destruction of Troy, notwithstanding the long passage of time: the only time in Virgil's epic where the Gorgon aegis explicitly is referenced as being used is in the ruin of Priam's city. We may think too that Pallas' aegis was a special project with connection to the Latin war that had commenced not long before Venus' solicitation of the arms: the Gorgon aegis would thus be connected both to the fall of Troy and to the new military struggle in Italy. In some sense the mention of the repairs on the aegis connect the final night of Troy with the war between the Trojans and the Italians.<sup>18</sup>

The Gorgon aegis that Athena wields terrifies the suitors in Odysseus' dining hall; the mere threat of the presumably insubstantial Gorgon head that Persephone was apparently bringing forth to scare shades is enough to end the hero's ghostly sojourn. In Virgil, Aeneas is ready to do battle with the shadowy image of the Gorgons (and plural, not singular, we might note); he will not be aware of the Gorgon poison of Allecto that the poet introduces in *Aeneid* 7, indeed he is ignorant too of Juno's summons of the infernal fury to set into motion the war he must fight in central Italy. For while Gorgons of the Virgilian underworld may pose no threat whatsoever to Aeneas, far deadlier is the Fury Allecto, who also has Gorgon associations:

*Exim Gorgoneis Allecto infecta venenis  
principio Latium et Laurentis tecta tyranni  
celsa petit...* (7.341-343)

The context is the description of the deadly employment of Allecto by Juno as a hellish avatar in the business of the instigation of the war in Latium. The reference here to the Gorgon(s)<sup>19</sup> is perhaps more on the level of metaphor than anything else;<sup>20</sup> Allecto is not literally in possession of the aegis, for example, but there is a clear enough parallel between the depiction of the baleful fury and that of

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<sup>18</sup> Minerva figures too on the shield of Aeneas that Vulcan manufactures for his stepson (8.699-700), with no specific reference to the aegis, though it is likely she should be envisaged as wielding her signal weapon.

<sup>19</sup> The plural may be poetic, or it may recall the *Gorgones* on the threshold of the lower world. Further, Allecto has many snakes for hair, and the plural vividly underscores this.

<sup>20</sup> See further here C. J. Fordyce, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Libri VII-VIII*, Oxford, 1977; also N. M. Horsfall, *Virgil, Aeneid 7, A Commentary*, Leiden-Boston-Köln, Brill, 2000, *ad loc.*

the goddess of reason as well as battle in *Aeneid* 2.<sup>21</sup> Minerva had the Gorgon aegis, however, and Allecto has Gorgon poison: commonalty is accompanied by significant distinction.<sup>22</sup> Like the Gorgon Medusa, Allecto has snakes in her hair that carry deadly venom; Allecto's horror is poison and not petrification. The "poison" of the Gorgon certainly recalls the blood of Medusa, but it refers in particular to the venom of her snaky hair.<sup>23</sup> Thus the Latin queen Amata is soon poisoned by a snake from Allecto's terrifying coiffure (7.349 ff.). The serpentine imagery serves in part to connect further Allecto and Minerva; the goddess had used monstrous snakes, after all, to slay Laocoön.<sup>24</sup>

The peril from Allecto is explicitly herpetological; the potential threat to Odysseus in the underworld is unspecified, just as the *Gorgones* of the Virgilian underworld are not characterized by any peculiar threat.<sup>25</sup> If anything, the implication of the close of *Odyssey* 11 is perhaps that the hero needs to take his leave before he risks petrification, but this is not made explicit in the text. Odysseus will not fight the Gorgon; his heroic predecessor Heracles did during his own *katabasis*, and it is likely deliberate that the image of Heracles is the last that Odysseus encounters before he makes his departure out of fear of the Gorgon.<sup>26</sup> Aeneas is willing to fight the insubstantial Gor-

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<sup>21</sup> For how Minerva is consistently depicted in Virgil as an opponent of Troy, see L. Fratantuono, *Pallasne Exurere Classem: Minerva in the Aeneid, Arcotos*, 51, 2017, 63-88.

<sup>22</sup> For a subtle discussion of some aspects of the goddess' aegis, with chromatic commentary on how now the weapon is protective and now destructive (perspective being key), see S. Deacy and A. Villing, *What Was the Colour of Athena's Aegis?*, *JHS*, 129, 2009, 111-129.

<sup>23</sup> The poison is assuredly an ominous, deadly thing; Gorgon imagery can occasionally be protective (cf. the case of Creüsa at the close of Euripides' *Ion*).

<sup>24</sup> *Aeneid* 2.199 ff. See further here V. Panoussi, *Vergil's Aeneid and Greek Tragedy: Ritual, Empire, and Intertext*, Cambridge, 2009, 111.

<sup>25</sup> The author of *Aeneid* 6.289a-d combined both the serpentine and the stony hazards in his extended description of Medusa.

<sup>26</sup> For Heracles' exploit with the Gorgon we may consult Ps.-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.5.12. See further H. Lloyd-Jones, *Heracles at Eleusis: P.Oxy. 2622 and P.S.I. 1391, Maia*, 19, 1967, 206-229; N. Robertson, *Heracles' 'Catabasis', Hermes*, 108, 1980, 274-300.



gons before the Sibyl dissuades him from the vain effort;<sup>27</sup> he is, however, unaware of the all too real Gorgon peril in Latium.

Souls fled Persephone's wielding of the perhaps insubstantial Gorgon head at the close of *Odyssey* 11. In Book 22, Athena uses the Gorgon-aegis to instill terror in the suitors. The dead suitors at the start of Book 24 are then depicted as they proceed to the underworld, gibbering like bats.<sup>28</sup> It would seem that in the heroic age after Perseus and Heracles, the Gorgon is the preserve of goddesses like Persephone and Athena; neither Odysseus nor Aeneas is fated to engage with the monster, in whatsoever form she manifests herself. Chaos has been conquered by reason, and Gorgons are wielded by goddesses: there is less room for heroes with the succession of the ages.

Toward the end of his underworld sojourn, Aeneas is told by the shade of Anchises about the wars that loom in his future, and of the Laurentine people and the city of Latinus. He is instructed in how he should flee and endure each labor: *et quo quemque modo fugiatque feratque laborem* (6.892). The detail about flight from labor has not received much critical attention. It is the closest correlation we find at the end of *Aeneid* 6 to anything like Odysseus' departure at the end of *Odyssey* 11 in the face of the Gorgon threat, which certainly qualifies as an example of a labor to be fled. Homer's underworld scene closes with an actual flight from perceived peril, while Virgil's counterpart narrative offers only a reference to how Aeneas was instructed in how to flee from certain labors in connection to the military struggle he must soon endure in Italy.

In the narrative of the Latin war in the second half of Virgil's epic, there is no readily identifiable example that can be adduced of a *labor fugiendus*. But there is an interesting scene that may have bearing on our study of Virgil's response to Homer's narrative of Odysseus' underworld exit. The scene is the battlefield in the wake of Aeneas' angry pursuit of Turnus in the aftermath of the slaying of the Arcadian Pallas. Juno is frightened (with good reason) that the Rutulian hero is doomed. Jupiter is willing to grant his consort one concession: Turnus may be saved for the moment, at least. Jupiter permits her to take Turnus away in flight: *tolle fuga Turnum, atque in-*

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<sup>27</sup> Typologically, Aeneas may be compared to Heracles. *Aeneid* 8 focuses on the past exploits of Hercules in Italy, as Evander tells the story of the destruction of Cacus by the storied hero, even as a new, Gorgon-inspired peril presents itself.

<sup>28</sup> *Odyssey* 24.5 ff.

*stantibus eripe fatis* (10.624). The goddess is given leave to snatch Turnus away in flight (i.e., from Aeneas). What Juno will proceed to set in motion will indeed secure the *fuga Turni*, but by the mechanism of the *fuga Aeneae*.

For what Juno actually proceeds to do is to fashion a phantom Aeneas, so that Turnus will be tricked into chasing a shadow, as it were. The phantom will flee, which will make it seem as if the real Turnus has fled the scene of battle, when in fact he is ardent to engage in combat with Aeneas. The eerie Aeneas doublet is like an underworld shade, or like a figure in a dream:

*tum dea nube cava tenuem sine viribus umbram,  
in faciem Aeneae, visu mirabile monstrum!  
Dardaniis ornat telis: clipeumque ibasque  
divini assimulat capitis; dat inania verba;  
dat sine mente sonum, gressusque effingit euntis.  
morte obita, quales fama est volitate figuras,  
aut quae sopitos deludunt somnia sensus.* (10.636-642)<sup>29</sup>

The ghostly apparition of Aeneas challenges Turnus (643-4); once the Rutulian responds with a cast of his spear, the image flees away. Turnus thinks that the real Aeneas is giving ground before him; he proceeds to chide his opponent: *quo fugis, Aenea?* (649). The *Aeneae fugientis imago* (656) seeks refuge in the ship of King Osinius from Clusium; Turnus is prevented from boarding the boat by Juno's timely snapping of the cable, which allows the ship to be swept over the waters (659-660). The ghost Aeneas departs away (663-664), its (Junonian) purpose having been accomplished. The audience is reminded *inter al.* that engaging in combat with phantoms is vain and purposeless. The Aeneas specter is portentous (cf. 10.637 *monstrum*), but the *monstrum* makes us think too of such underworld specters as that which Homer's Odysseus fled and Virgil's Aeneas sought to slay.

The passage offers a striking intratextual commentary on the underworld exit scenes in both Virgil and Homer. There is a phantom Aeneas, as if he were dead and in the underworld; he is clearly a puppet of Juno, and he flees so as to distract Turnus from the real, all too dangerous Aeneas. He flees in the same manner that we might ascribe

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<sup>29</sup> For commentary on this passage see S. J. Harrison, *Vergil, Aeneid 10*, Oxford, 1991.

to some stereotypically timid underworld soul. The Aeneas *imago* manages to do what the shade of Anchises spoke about to the real Aeneas: he flees a labor, sc. of fighting with Turnus (indeed, the description of the ghost puts emphasis on its flight). The Rutulian is reduced to fighting with a shadow, and to chasing a ghost conjured by Juno; he does, in other words, what Aeneas was inclined to do almost reflexively when confronted with the ghostly Gorgon apparitions. The Aeneas ghost flees to a boat, and Juno cuts the cables; at the end of *Odyssey* 11 the real Odysseus returns to his boat in flight from ghosts, and he orders his companions to embark and to cut the cables (11. 636-637).<sup>30</sup> Virgil's Aeneas walks in the underworld as a living being; he also flits across the earth as a ghostly, manufactured shade. Neither the real Aeneas nor the real Turnus understands what has happened in the business of the phantom; Turnus indeed laments to Jupiter, wondering rhetorically what flight could return him now to his fellows (*Aeneid* 10.670 *quae me fuga*), given his embarrassment and shame at appearing to flee from the fight. The rueful Turnus voices a question that once again underscores the importance of flight to the episode of the ghost.

Significantly, when the time comes for Turnus' final encounter with Aeneas, he will be compared to a man in a dream:

*ac velut in somnis, oculos ubi languida pressit  
nocte quies, nequicquam avidos extendere cursus  
velle videtur, et in mediis conatibus aegri  
succidimus: non lingua valet, non corpore notae  
sufficiunt vires, nec vox nec verba sequuntur  
sic Turno, quacumque vim virtute petivit,  
successum dea dira negavit...* (12.908-914)<sup>31</sup>

In the critical engagement with Aeneas, now the living Turnus is reduced to the status of a phantom. We have observed that it is difficult to adduce an instance where Aeneas flees a labor in accord with the admonitions of his father's shade. Instead, Virgil depicts Turnus' pursuit of a fleeing phantom Aeneas, only then to reverse the image and to have the Rutulian compared to a dream image as he struggles

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<sup>30</sup> The fact that these episodes occur at almost the same line numbers in *Odyssey* 11 and *Aeneid* 10 may be judged by some to be a fortuitous coincidence.

<sup>31</sup> On this simile see further R. Tarrant, *Virgil: Aeneid XII*, Cambridge, 2012, *ad loc.*

in his fateful, final engagement with his foe. The Book 10 ghost episode serves as prelude for the dream simile of the climactic fight of Book 12, a veritable nightmare from which in some sense Turnus will not awake.

Homer's hero fled in the face of a ghostly Gorgon threat; in his hour of decisive need, Athena would be present with the substantial Gorgon aegis to drive Odysseus' foes in fearful flight. Virgil's hero sought to do battle with insubstantial Gorgon specters; in his hour of crisis in Italy, Gorgon venom would be employed to spread the poison, as it were, of war and bloodshed in Latium: the Gorgon pattern is thus reversed as we move from *Odyssey* to *Aeneid*. In the actual drama of the Latin war, a ghostly Aeneas would flee from Turnus in a manner not unlike Odysseus' flight from the threshold of the underworld to the deck of his ship, while in the decisive final encounter of the battle foes, it would be Turnus who is like a dream figure, in eerie presage of his imminent departure to the realm of shades: another neat reversal of (in this instance, dream) imagery from Homer to Virgil.

The shade of Anchises had taught Aeneas how he should flee and bear each labor of his forthcoming war; in the actual narrative of the military struggle, the "flight" of Aeneas was that of a phantom, in reversal of the Homeric pattern of Odysseus fleeing a monstrous specter. By the close not of *Aeneid* 6 but of *Aeneid* 12, Turnus would face his own doom, as first he was compared to a dream figure, and then finally he was slain by the wrathful Aeneas, his corporal reality reduced to a ghostly existence *sub umbras*. In the closing verses of Virgil's epic, the Trojan hero abdicates some measure of his responsibility for his slaying of Turnus by ascribing the killing to the action of the shade of the departed Arcadian Pallas:

... *Pallas te hoc vulnere, Pallas*  
*immolat, et poenam scelerato ex sanguine sumit* (12.948-949)

*Pallās* is the name of the hero; with a short vowel it would be the goddess famous for her wielding of the aegis, though here the second vowel is long by position.<sup>32</sup> Sarah Spence highlights how the "ambiguous nominative" may help to secure a shade of allusion here

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<sup>32</sup> See further here S. Spence, *The Polyvalence of Pallas in the Aeneid, Arethusa*, 32/2, 1999, 149-163, especially 157-158; cf. L. Fratantuono, *op. cit.*, *Arctos*, LI, 2017, 63-89, especially 84 ff.

to the goddess alongside the obvious reference to the dead young warrior. Athena appears at the close of the *Odyssey* to help to secure the peace between Odysseus' household and the Ithacans; she plays a more violent role, however, with her Gorgon aegis in the frightening of the suitors during the battle and slaughter in Odysseus' hall. In other words, the evocation of the goddess "Pallas" at the close of the *Aeneid* recalls both the decisive appearance of the goddess in Odysseus' battle with the suitors, and also her intervention at the end of the *Odyssey*. The second allusion references the peace that one might hope would ensue after the death of Turnus (though the complicated traditions of Aeneas/Ascanius in Latium might give one pause), while the first is a reminiscence of the violence in the dining hall when Odysseus revealed himself to the suitors and took his revenge. The one allusion is formally appropriate as coming at the close of the epic; the second is thematically fitting as an evocation of the mighty act of vengeance exercised by Odysseus against the suitors. Indeed, the double Homeric reminiscence serves in part to underscore the deliberately ambiguous nature of the close of the *Aeneid*, with "Pallas" serving as a reminder of how the goddess Athena/Minerva is a harbinger of both reconciliation and destruction.

We may trace, then, a rich web of inter- and intratextual allusions from Homer's *Odyssey* to Virgil's epic. Odysseus avoids confrontation with underworld monsters (shadowy or not), and he is aided by Athena in both the works of vengeful violence/quasi-war and the settlement of peace in Ithaca. It is, all things considered, a neat and logical progression of images that help to tie together Odysseus' successful *katabasis* as well as the resolution of his affairs in Ithaca.

For Virgil, the reversal of Homer's Gorgon imagery is purposeful in its disquieting effect, as we move from Aeneas' attempt to vanquish ghosts to his unawareness of the Gorgon poison of Allecto.<sup>33</sup> The goddess Pallas was involved in the ruin of Troy (indeed, it constitutes her only "appearance" in the narrative of the epic, as Aeneas relates to Dido's court how Venus revealed the divine machinery at work in the city's destruction), and she figures in the glorious vision of Actium on the shield that celebrates the Augustan victory over Cleopatra and Antony. Along the way from Troy's fall to the dawn of the *Pax Augusta*, the Latin war poses a significant problem on many lev-

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<sup>33</sup> Significantly, Turnus is all too aware of the hellish Junonian avatar.

els. Trojan Aeneas must win, but ultimately Rome will be Italian and not Trojan.<sup>34</sup> The war is set in motion (*Aeneid* 7) by Juno's appropriation of something of the prerogative of the battle goddess Pallas, namely Gorgonian power (poison and not aegis); we are reminded soon enough (*Aeneid* 8) of Pallas' aegis, as we move from the delayed projects in Vulcan's forge to the monumental future vision of the goddess on the shield, in battle against the forces of the eastern potentate Cleopatra (where the aegis is not mentioned, even if its presence may be implied).

No Gorgons in Aeneas' exit from the underworld, but an admonition about how to flee and face each labor of war. In actuality there would be the flight only of a Juno-conjured Aeneas-*Geist* from Turnus, a striking image that would be reversed when Turnus was himself like a man in a dream as he met Aeneas for the last time. At the close of that single combat, the goddess Pallas would be invoked however subtly and allusively, as the allusion to Athena highlights both the vengeful act of Aeneas' action in slaying the suppliant Turnus, and the establishment of peace by the burial of a sword, in itself an act of quasi-founding (cf. the ring of 12.950 *condit* and 1.5 *conderet urbem*): memories of the destruction of the suitors, and of the peace that is assured in the closing lines of the *Odyssey*.<sup>35</sup> No goddess and no aegis in the closing verses of the *Aeneid*, but rather a hero who recalls both Homer's Odysseus in his violent retribution, and Achilles too before the giving up of his wrath: an Aeneas for whom it is as if the closing books of both *Odyssey* and *Iliad* were left sadly unread.

Our investigation of the question of when or if Aeneas actually ever "flees" in the progress of the Latin war has led to consideration of the Aeneas phantom of Book 10 and the simile of Turnus as a man in a dream in Book 12. Herein we may find too an interesting twist on the much discussed enigma of the *Somni Portae* from the end of Virgil's underworld. There, *verae umbrae* are said to exit from the gate

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Aeneid* 12.807 ff. Juno secures from Jupiter first the concession that Turnus may live a little longer (Book 10), and then the decisive, highly consequential concession that the future Rome will be Italian in *sermo* and *mores* and not Trojan (Book 12).

<sup>35</sup> At 12.937 ... *tua est Lavinia coniunx*, we are briefly reminded in Turnus' surrender of all claim to Lavinia of the problem of rival suitors that is central to the Ithacan stage of Homer's epic.

of horn, while *falsa insomnia* depart via the ivory portal.<sup>36</sup> Aeneas is sent out by Anchises' shade via the latter, and thence commences the composition of an enormous and ultimately inconclusive bibliography: poets are permitted their puzzles, and some enigmas defy ready cyphers to unlock their meanings.

But what has not been appreciated in the commentary tradition is that Aeneas is the only character in the poem who will actually become one of the *falsa insomnia*, when he is at least in some sense transformed into a dream-like phantom or underworld shade by Juno. The Aeneas ghost explicitly is associated with both underworld shades and dream figures (cf. 10.641-642); the double comparison responds exactly to the references to the *verae umbrae* (i.e., underworld denizens) and *falsa insomnia* (i.e., dream images) from the description of the Gates of Sleep. Turnus is like a man in a dream at 12.908-914; certainly that simile portends the hero's forthcoming transformation into a true shade. The Aeneas figure that Juno conjures, however, accords perfectly with the transit requirements, as it were, for exit from the Ivory Gate. Juno fashions a phantom that incarnates the description of that which passes through the gate; her ghost is a false dream, an *εἶδωλον* that is like the shades of the dead in the underworld.

The ghost scene from *Aeneid* 10 thus deliberately recalls the description and mechanism of Aeneas' exit from the underworld. The behavior of the Aeneas phantom offers a reminiscence of the instructions of Aeneas' father's shade on how to flee and how to face the respective labors of the Italian war. In turn the appearance of the Aeneas phantom leads to the comparison of Turnus to a man in a dream as he makes his last stand against his Trojan foe near the end of Book 12. The phantom had been conjured so as to secure a respite for Turnus, and when there is no opportunity for further delay in the execution of Turnus' fate, he is, fittingly enough, compared to that which had served as the mechanism of his temporary salvation in Book 10. The Aeneas phantom is both real and false; it is not a figure of simile like the dream-man of Book 12, but it is also one of the *falsa insomnia*, for all its seeming reality. Aeneas exits the underworld as substantial being, but he will be depicted later as a diurnal dream figure, as one of the false dreams that use the Ivory Gate. Turnus for his part

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<sup>36</sup> *Aeneid* 6.893-898.

proceeds from being like a man in a dream to going down *sub umbras* (12.952, the last words of the epic) as one of the *verae umbrae*.

We have drawn a line from Aeneas' exiting of the underworld to the ultimate fate of Turnus (i.e., his *entrance* to Avernus). We have identified connections between on the one hand the agency of the goddess Pallas in the fate of the suitors in *Odyssey* 22 and the resolution of Ithacan affairs at the end of Book 24, and on the other hand the fate of Aeneas' rival Turnus at the close of *Aeneid* 12, a fate that blends elements of both the violent end of Penelope's suitors, and the settlement of conflict and the restoration of peace in Ithaca via intertextual reminiscence. Lastly, we have considered how Virgil reverses the Homeric depiction of underworld Gorgon imagery, whereby Aeneas is shown aspiring to fight against mere monstrous specters (as later Turnus will be tricked into attacking a similarly insubstantial *monstrum*),<sup>37</sup> all the while unaware of the deadly intervention of Juno's minion Allecto with her Gorgon venom to engender war in Italy (Allecto, who attacks Turnus in direct and terrifying manifestation, as the Fury reveals her true appearance to the young hero).<sup>38</sup>

Homer's Odysseus preferred to flee from the possibility of encountering the Gorgon head, however insubstantial Persephone's monster would be. After discourse with the *εἰδωλον* of a hero who had done battle with an underworld Gorgon, Odysseus would not confront the monster (whether she was real or a shadow). He would in turn enjoy the continuing favor of Athena, who would wield the Gorgon aegis in furtherance of his victory over the suitors of his wife, even as she also secured peace and the ultimate resolution of the internecine conflict in Odysseus' Ithaca.<sup>39</sup> Virgil's Aeneas (rather more recklessly, we might think) was willing to engage in pointless combat with Gorgon ghosts. He would be unaware of the all too real Gorgon

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. the *monstra* of *Aeneid* 6.285 and the *monstrum* of 10.637.

<sup>38</sup> *Aeneid* 7.445 ff.

<sup>39</sup> The *Odyssey* presents the picture first of the defeat of the suitors, and then of the quelling of any future retributory unrest. The *Aeneid* closes abruptly with the death of Lavinia's suitor, with no narrative of settlement. In part this reflects the awkward reality that the promised new city would be Ausonian; the critical detail *subsident Teucro* (12.836) is reserved for private immortal colloquy even before Aeneas makes his decision to slay Turnus. *Subsident Teucro* (12.836). Already at 12.492 *poplite subsidens* we see a foreshadowing of the future, as Aeneas sinks down on his knee in the wake of his serious wounding in battle, a wound that ultimately requires the intervention of Venus to secure healing.



forces at work at Juno's behest in ensuring that he would have to face a bloody war in his new, Italian home. He would be unaware of how he would be conjured as a fleeing, false dream by Juno in her efforts to delay the death of her beloved Turnus, in unexpected fulfillment of certain details of his exit from the underworld. Lastly, he would be unaware of the implications of his invocation of the Arcadian Pallas in his slaying of the quasi-dream man Turnus, whereby he ensured that simile would become sanguinary reality.<sup>40</sup> By invoking Pallas the dead Arcadian, Aeneas managed also to recall the image of Pallas the goddess in his moment of seeming victory, unaware of how the goddess who had presided over the doom of Priam's Troy was also thus allusively being credited with the very act that would secure another, more lasting death of Troy: Turnus' death and Aeneas' victory, after all, lead to the establishment of the city (*conderet urbem*) of Rome that would be Italian and not Trojan.<sup>41</sup>

In Homer the apotropaic Gorgon of Athena's aegis reduces the suitors to panic-stricken flight; the Gorgon head that Persephone is envisaged as wielding is a sight that Odysseus is understandably loathe to countenance. Virgil's Aeneas engaged phantom Gorgons in vain battle, while his Turnus was confronted with the incarnation of Gorgon poison, against which he had no recourse. The machinations of Juno would provoke a war in Italy; would find a respite from doom at least for a while for her Rutulian champion; and ultimately would secure for the goddess a favorable settlement of affairs in Italy via the terms of her reconciliation with Jupiter. It would be for Pallas, the battle goddess armed with the Gorgon aegis, to oversee the destruction of Troy; to participate in the defeat of Cleopatra; and in the end to be associated however allusively with the death of Turnus, a death that would secure a settlement similar to that of the close of Homer's *Odyssey*, not only in terms of the death of a rival and the resolution of a conflict, but more hauntingly in the setting in motion of the future suppression of Trojan customs in the new Rome, and in the relegation of the great city of Priam to the realm of memory.

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<sup>40</sup> Aeneas ascribes the making of a ghost to a ghost by his crediting of Pallas with the immolation of Turnus. Turnus had already been compared to a dream figure; Aeneas thereby credits a ghost with the rendering of the dream figure to the status of a ghost.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. also the aforementioned association of the goddess Pallas with the defeat of Cleopatra and Antony on the shield.