Mehran A. Nickbakht

CLOSURE AND CONTINUATION: THE POETICS OF AENEID 6.900-1

As the dramatic sixth book of the Aeneid comes to its conclusion, the hero sails safely and uneventfully into harbor:

Tum se ad Caietae recto fert limite portum.
ancora de proa tacitur, stant litore puppes. (6.900-1)

Over the years, the authenticity of line 901, a doublet of 3.277, has been repeatedly questioned without reaching a satisfactory consensus. Most recently, O. Zwierlein has declared both lines 900 and 901 spurious, attributing the latter to Julius Moma- nus, a Vergilian scholar in the time of Tiberius, allegedly responsible for numerous verse repetitions in Vergil's works. In an earlier study on repeated lines in Homer and Vergil, however, J. Wills presents compelling arguments for the retention of line 901 as authentic. He demonstrates Vergil's sophisticated use of Homeric doublets in achieving structural allusions: "The formal parallelism between the last lines of Book 6 and Book 12, as doublet members from the Odyssey and Iliad respectively, reinforces the well-known thematic division of the Aeneid into a story of a journey and a story of conquest."

Lines 900-1, in addition to narrating the plot, also act as a metaphor for literary production. More precisely, they mark a point of termination at this stage in the course of the epic. Thus with the poetic ship entering the harbor and dropping its anchor, the poet has come to the completion of his composition. A glance at how the narrative proper in the Aeneid begins indeed confirms this read-

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1 I quote the OCT by R. A. B. Mynors.
5 Wills (n.4), 199-202.
6 Seafaring is a well-parallelized image of literary activity in Latin literature: e.g. Verg. Georg. 2.41; Prop. 3.3.22-4; Hor. Carm. 4.15.3-4; Mant. 2.58; Ovid Met. 15.176.
7 Wills (n.4), 199.
However, since we are now in Book 7, the Trojans continue undisturbed on their direct course.

In other words, the divergence of Vergil’s revisionist Circe episode\(^{14}\) from the Homeric model has the effect of Aeneas’ literal praeferretio\(^{15}\) signalling that the ‘Odyssean’ part of the poem is now finished\(^{16}\). And yet, at the same time, the Circe episode in Vergil, no matter how altered and mutilated it is in comparison with the Homeric archetype, nevertheless indicates that the ‘Odyssey’ (in a general sense of seafaring) is continuing. Not only does the presence of Circe inherently refer back to the Homeric epic; Vergil’s toned-down version of Circe in fact adapts another famous episode from that epic, namely the episode of the Sirens (Od. 12.153–200). On the literal level then, both the Vergilian and Homeric episodes present a hero’s narrow avoidance of shores inhabited by dangerous and vociferous female figures. The episodes also hold an identical position within the structure of each epic. In both cases, the near-encounter occurs after the respective hero’s first port of call upon his return from the Underworld:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Odyssey</th>
<th>Underworld</th>
<th>First port of call</th>
<th>Near-encounter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aeneid</td>
<td>Underworld</td>
<td>Kirke</td>
<td>Sirens</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caieta</td>
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The island of Kirke in the Odyssey, however, not only parallels the harbor of Caieta as the station between the Underworld and the near-encounter, but Kirke also merges with the Sirens, as it were, to become the Circe of the Aeneid\(^{17}\).

Before proceeding any further, let us take another look at the final image of Book 6. It is worth noting that portus (900) takes on the role of a signpost that both calls attention to and plays on the larger thematic metaphor of navigation\(^{18}\). But as *litis* in the

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\(^{15}\) *praeter vada ferae inessit* (7.24), one of only 3 occurrences of *praeter* in Vergil is N. Hornblow, *Vergil: Aeneid 7*, Leiden 2000, notes ad loc. The *locution vada ferae* (*seething shallows*), although topic, in this case may be motivated by the Homeric simile of water boiling in a cauldron (Od. 12.237–240), a simile used for the turbulent waves of Charybdis that Odysseus managed to bypass. Similarly, * fugat reddid* in the same line may owe something to *Odysseus*’ (earlier) question as to how to escape (παρθένοις/γυναικείοις) best from Charybdis and Scylla (Od. 12.113) and Circe’s response: *quaevace quae et cunctos deos omnes.* (12.120).

\(^{16}\) F.J. Wormald, Elementa einer Poetik des Athenaeus, Münster 1963, 39, and R. Baxo, The Grazing of Circe’s shores: a note on *Aen*. 7.10. 1823, 32, 42–43, have come to a similar conclusion about the significance of the Circe episode, but do not consider the boundary between Books 6 and 7.

\(^{17}\) This fusion (or contamination) of Homeric motifs in the *Aeneid* is not discussed in Knauer’s otherwise comprehensive study (n. 13).

\(^{18}\) *Portus* together with *ancora* and *pappus* (901) hold prominent positions at the end and the beginning of the line, respectively. Arranged in what D. L. Lattner (Mimetic syntax, *APJ* 111, 1990, 204–237) called ‘mimetic or iconic syntax’, *portus* as the end-point of Aeneas’ ‘... appears therefore in final position, while *ancora* (with
following line suggests, there is no regular port; the ships are merely pulled ashore, underscoring the figurative use of the word portus here, that is, as the τὸ λιμάνι of the voyage (and of the book) rather than an actual λιμάνι. Potentially, however, the word can also be considered a semantic-phonetic wordplay in portus – λιμάνι – λίμην, indicating that the portus to which Aeneas proceeds is also a limen, a “threshold” between one part of the poem and the other. The strong sense of closure and finality at the end of Book 6 then turns out to be far less conclusive. In fact, the end appears rather fluid and open-ended, as termination and sequel are found to be encapsulated in one and the same word. Moreover, the word portus, albeit not clearly attested thus in ancient etymologies, is related to porta21, an apt association, no less, since a door both closes and opens, exactly what the ‘port’ does for the poet’s ship. This open ending perfectly harmonizes with the argument above that the Vergilian ‘Odyssey’ concludes at the midpoint of the epic, while it also continues beyond that boundary, spilling over into Book 7.

Further symbolism occurs in the last line of Book 6, in the word lites. Having noticed the presence of shorelines at the beginning and end of the central books in the Aeneid, J. Wills recognizes their significance as “boundary markers.” He concludes that “coastlines are obvious signals of liminality; they provide a sort of narrative punctuation which encloses separate books but also articulates the connections between them.” This observation certainly holds true for the pivotal midpoint of the Aeneid where the back-to-back recurrence of lites in 6.901 (litore) and 7.1 (litoris) both marks and permeates the boundary between the two books, and by extension, the two halves of the epic. Accordingly, the effective closure of Book 6 is balanced by an opening at the beginning of the subsequent book as the narrative of the Aeneid continues. The initial lines of Book 7—notwithstanding the explicitly new start

—proviso—

and puppies (‘sterns’) in the next line hold positions not only rendering the structure of a ship (iconic), but also according to the position of the ship as anchored on the shore (minuet). See Aen. 6.3–5 both for stylistic comparison and evidence for sternward anchorages; cf. also the respective beaching operations of Aeneas and Tarchon (10.287–297), and Cicero’sautoposy of manus vires of going astern at Caieta (ad Att. 13.21.3).

21 Cf. ThLL X, 2 p. 65, 5–18 s.v. portus II B 4b.
23 Cf. also B. R. Nagle, Open-ended closure in Aeneid 2, CW 76, 1982/3, 257–263.
25 Walde–Hofmann, Lateinische etymologisches Wörterbuch, Heidelberg 1959, s.v. It may be noteworthy that in fact portus (‘exit’) play a very prominent role in the seven lines (6.893–9) leading up to the final couplet.
26 Wills (n. 4), 199 with n. 33.

prompted by the Aeneid’s second major proem only 37 lines later25 — represent a pronounced fresh start at the head of the new book:

_Tu quoque litoribus nostris, Aeneia nutrix, aeternam morien famam, Caieta, dedisti; et nunc servat honos sedent tuus, ossaque nomen Hesperia in magna, si qua est ea gloria, signat. (Aen. 7.1–4)_

Besides the telling shoreline (litoribus), the apostrophe of Caieta (with its implicit presence of the poet) procures a sense of a formal beginning. Moreover, verbal and semantic echoes from the proem to Lucretius’ De rerum natura further enhance the opening character of the initial lines of Book 7:

_Aeneadum generix, hominum diviugae voleanas, alma Venus, cael temper labenta signa (DRN 1.1–2)_

There is a noticeable affinity between Aeneia nutrix in Vergil and Lucretius’ Aeneadum generix. Furthermore, in the first line, Caieta is addressed solely by onomastics, only to be called upon by her proper name in line 2. Exactly the same pattern occurs in Lucretius, where Aeneadum generix in line 1 precedes Venus in line 2. Finally, Caieta as the actual nutrix of Aeneas, corresponds to the figuratively nourishing alma Venus. Thus, without actually invoking a muse, the Lucretian intertext turns the apostrophe of Caieta into a proemial invocation, elevating this passage into the formal opening of the book26.

At the same time, the definition of the coast as being “ours” (litoribus nostris), characterizes it — to the implied reader — as the Italian coast, which is of course Aeneas’ final destination.27 The mention of Hesperia (7.4) further affirms that Aeneas has arrived at his predestined goal, since Creusa (2.781), the Penates (3.163), and already Cassandra (3.185–7) had all named Hesperia as the future home of the Trojans. Accordingly, with Aeneas’ arrival at his goal, the end of his wandering (‘Odyssey’) is again implied, and he can proceed to the next part of his mission. By balancing the

25 For a recent discussion of the ‘delayed’ second proem (7.37–45) and bibliography, cf. Horsfall (n. 15) ad loc.
26 See also Worstbrock (n. 16) 34. Prof. M. Korenšek points out to me that (1) fittingly, DRN, like the second half of the Aeneid, consists of precisely six books; (2) the reference of Aen. 7.1–2 to DRN 1.1–2 is subsequently confirmed by the invocation of an erotic deity in Aen. 7.37–45 (Erato). The observation of this correspondence may help to shed some light on the much debated choice of the muse in Vergil’s second proem (cf. Horsfall (n. 15) ad loc.) for just as Erato stands in for Venus, as it were, so too, the divine protector of the epic’s hero, simultaneously becomes the divine patron of the epic’s creator.
27 Italia is mentioned repeatedly as the new homeland, cf. e.g. Aen. 1.2–3: Italiam...Laviniaque venit/ litora. Worstbrock (n. 16), 35 may in fact be correct in identifying the present litora nostra with Lavinia litora mentioned in the proem (1.2–3).
closing lines of the previous book, the initial lines of Book 7 thus convey both in form and content that something new is beginning. In summary, the common division into what is usually referred to as the ‘Odyssean’ and ‘Iliadic’ halves of the Aeneid occurs not in one, but in two separate positions. With each part marked by a major proem at the respective beginnings, and the second proem ‘delayed’ until 37 lines into Book 7, the division is clearly determined between lines 36 and 37. The imminent transition is in fact signposted in lines 7.35–6 (flectere iter sociis terraque adeunter ad proras / imperat et laetus flumio succedit opaco)\textsuperscript{28}, as Aeneas’ nautical manoeuvres reflect the poet’s making a turn in his composition toward the terrestrial part (terræ) of his epic. However, Vergil does not entirely ignore the thematic division at the point where it is most readily expected, i.e., in the Aeneid’s arithmetic midpoint\textsuperscript{30}. In employing subtle closing and opening devices respectively at the end of Book 6 and at the beginning of Book 7, and in characterizing the final leg of Aeneas’ sea voyage in a specifically ‘non-Odyssean’ fashion, he in fact brings to the fore the symmetrical break of the twelve-book epic while staying in line with the poem’s thematic division. This is not to say, of course, that Vergil obliterates the continuity of the narrative as a whole; rather, he has it both ways. Vergil emphasizes the break between Book 6 and Book 7, even while bridging the median division and connecting the separate books by virtue of the Caieta vignette (6.900–7.7) which makes a smooth transition from the ‘Odyssean’ half to the ‘Iliadic’ half ensuring a steady flow of the story line\textsuperscript{31}. In stressing the components as well as the unity of the poem (cf. arma virumque), Vergil points to the two Homeric models, which he emulates and at the same time unites in his own single creation of the Aeneid.

Universität Bern
Historisches Institut

CH - 3012 Bern

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\textsuperscript{28} Cf. also Aen. 7.7: tendit iter velis portumque relinquit which, by corresponding to 6.900–1 (and paralleling 1.34–5), again takes on a meta-literary tone and enhances the impression of a new start.

\textsuperscript{29} The correspondence between joyfully navigating Aeneas (laetus) and the joyfully sailing Trojans (laetì) in 1.35 appears to frame the entire narrative in between, and may thus be read as a further confirmation of the unity of this ‘Odyssean’ part.

\textsuperscript{30} See M. A. Nickbakht, Further Evidence of the Original Outline of Ovid’s Ars amatoria (1.771–2), Mnanemosyne (forthcoming), where I argue that Ovid, by alluding to the end of Aeneid 6 at the end of Ars 1, marks the arithmetic midpoint of his initially 2-book poem.

\textsuperscript{31} Cf. D. P. Fowler, First Thoughts on Closure, MD 22, 1989, 95 ‘Vergil in fact goes out of his way to deny a strong closure to Book Six, though the final couplet is not without closural features and Book Seven does start powerfully with the death of Caieta.’ On the Caieta episode as a ‘bridge narrative’, see S. Hinds, Allusion and Intertext. Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry (Cambridge 1998), 108–110.