

The real Climax of Vergil's *Aeneid* VI

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There have been many studies on the structure of the *Aeneid*, and of the particular books it is composed of. Some scholars have traditionally placed VI as the centre of the epic.¹ Numerically, this is impossible, as neither VI nor VII is at the centre of the poem,² but VI and VII taken together. This further supports the tripartite division of the *Aeneid*, making V-VIII its centre.³

The above last assumption of the tripartite division of the *Aeneid* leads one to suppose that VI and VII are at the centre of V-VIII and, indeed, at the centre of the epic;⁴ and, furthermore, that the centre of the two books is really the last two lines of Book VI and the first two lines of Book VII,⁵ which read as follows:

Tum se ad Caietae // recto fert litore portum. (6.900)
ancora de prora // iacitur; stant litore puppes.

Tu quoque litoribus // nostris, Aeneia nutrix, (7.1)
aeternam moriens // famam, Caieta, dedisti.⁶

¹ As in J. Perret (1965), 113. W.A. Camps (1954), 214, places the centre at 7.25-285, where we are told how the Latins have been supernaturally warned to expect the coming of a man of destiny. B. Otis (1964), 218, also places VII as the centre of the *Aeneid*, because, as he says, VII brings Aeneas to Italy. But Vergil made Aeneas come to Italy for the first time in VI!

² J. Perret (1965), 113, in grouping the *Aeneid*'s books into two halves, leaves VI as isolated and climax of the whole epic.

³ As is G.E. Duckworth (1957), 3, and K. Quinn (1968), 67. W.A. Camps (1967-1968), 28, however, refers to a different structure of the *Aeneid*, that is, 1-4, 5-6 and 7-12. Although he ties VI with V through the spirit of Anchises, he still takes VI with VII and VIII whose sites are respectively Italy, Latium and Rome.

⁴ For the division of the two halves of the *Aeneid* at VI and VII, commonly called the Odyssean and the Iliadic halves, see, for example, G.E. Duckworth (1957), 2, G.E. Duckworth (1962), 7, R.D. Williams (1963), 266-274, B. Otis (1964), 217, J.P. Poe (1965), 321-336, A.J. Boyle (1972a), 63, and K.W. Gransden (1984), 1. Duckworth calls I – VI as the prelude, VII – XII as the *maius opus*. Boyle describes the first half as Aeneas' search for an empire, the second as his practice of that empire. He calls VI a 'meta-book' (A.J. Boyle, 1972b, 113). The turning-point of the *Aeneid* also coincides with the turning-point in Aeneas' experience, his conversion after the revelations he received towards the end of VI (114). River Lethe at the end of VI helps to make Aeneas *immemor* of his past in order to face the new challenges in the second half of the book (127-128). Despite all this, VII – XII will continue to provide Aeneas fresh *labores* and *errores* which he experienced in the first half of the *Aeneid* (see also P.R. Doob, 1990, 240).

⁵ In this way, the end of VI ties up with the beginning of VII, just as through Palinurus, the end of V ties up with the beginning of VI, a point already made by M. Paschalis (1986), 40.

⁶ To appreciate the style of these four lines, composed of eleven spondees and five dactyls in the first four feet, one may refer to the triple hyperbata in 6.900 (*abcdebec*); the chiasmus in 6.901 (*abcddeca*); the repetition of *litore* in the fifth foot in 6.900-901; the alliteration of *m* in the first three words of 7.2; the splitting of the vocative (*Aeneia nutrix ... Caieta*) in 7.1-2; the making of the subject and verb the first and last words (*tu ... dedisti*) in 7.1-2, and the repetition of name of *Caieta* in the first and last of these four lines. K. Quinn (1968), 65, notes the use of the historic present at the end of VI, as at the end of VII, VIII, X, XI and XII.

These four lines say that the Trojans come to Caieta, the place-name that Caieta, Aeneas' nurse, gives to their first landing in Latium.⁷ First they come to the place with Caieta alive, then they leave it after her death, which death occurred either during the short trip from Cumae, or soon after landing. In Book VI, it is as if Caieta had already died (if they come to Caieta); that fact we gather surely when we read on into Book VII (where the dead Caieta is addressed). Caieta, alive or dead, is the link between the central two books, the culmination of the *Aeneid*, that is, the coming to the Promised Land, which is Latium (not Cumae). This culmination is preceded by a progressive series of scenes (as we shall see below) which make up *Aeneid* VI. To sustain this statement, I propose here to first give a break-down of the structure of the book, and then to explain how this culmination is reached.

1. Arrival (13 ll.)

1-13 (13 ll.) The Trojans arrive at Cumae and search for fire, water and Apollo's temple.

2. Daedalus (20 ll.)

14-19 (6 ll.) Daedalus flies from Crete to Cumae.
 20-30 (11 ll.) The ecphrasis on the temple's gate.
 31-33 (3 ll.) Why Icarus was not included in the ecphrasis.

3. Aeneas and the Sibyl (122 ll.)

34-41 (8 ll.) The arrival of Achates and the Sibyl, and the sacrifice.
 42-44 (3 ll.) The Sibyl's cave.
 45-53 (9 ll.) The Sibyl's speech.
 54-76 (23 ll.) Aeneas' prayer.
 77-97 (21 ll.) The Sibyl's prophecy.
 98-123 (26 ll.) Aeneas asks to be led to the Underworld.
 124-155 (32 ll.) The Sibyl lays two conditions for Aeneas' success in descending down to the Underworld.

4. Misenus (112 ll.)

156-165 (10 ll.) Aeneas and Achates come upon the corpse of Misenus.
 166-174 (9 ll.) The background of Misenus and the cause of his death.
 175-182 (8 ll.) The Trojans prepare the funeral pile.
 183-211 (29 ll.) Aeneas discovers and plucks the Golden Bough.
 212-235 (24 ll.) The Trojans hold funeral rites for Misenus.
 236-263 (28 ll.) The Sibyl and Aeneas perform sacrifices to the Underworld deities and penetrate into the cave.
 264-267 (4 ll.) Invocation to the Underworld deities.

5. The Underworld (268-892: 625 ll.)

⁷ E.L. Harrison (1977), 103, links the landing at Caieta at the beginning of VII with that at Cumae at the beginning of VI.

1. *Entrance to the Underworld* (158 ll.)

268-281 (14 ll.)	Darkness and ugly images.
282-294 (13 ll.)	Tree of False Dreams and Hybrid Beasts.
295-316 (22 ll.)	Charon and the Styx river. ⁸
317-336 (20 ll.)	The Sibyl explains how only the buried are ferried by Charon.
337-383 (47 ll.)	Palinurus is denied passage.
384-416 (33 ll.)	Charon ferries Aeneas and the Sibyl.
417-425 (9 ll.)	Aeneas and the Sibyl walk past the drugged Cerberus.

2. *Limbo* (122 ll.)

426-449 (24 ll.)	Aeneas and the Sibyl visit those whose lives were cut short.
450-476 (27 ll.)	Aeneas meets Dido.
477-494 (18 ll.)	Aeneas meets Trojans and Achaeans killed in war.
495-499 (5 ll.)	Aeneas meets Deiphobus.
500-508 (9 ll.)	Aeneas addresses Deiphobus.
509-534 (26 ll.)	Deiphobus replies to Aeneas.
535-547 (13 ll.)	The Sibyl interrupts the conversation between Aeneas and Deiphobus. She introduces Aeneas to Tartarus and Elysium.

3. *Tartarus* (80 ll.)

548-561 (14 ll.)	Aeneas sees Tartarus and asks the Sibyl to explain what goes on within.
562-627 (66 ll.)	The Sibyl explains the crimes and punishments of Tartarus.

4. *The presentation of the Golden Bough* (9 ll.)

628-636 (9 ll.)	The Sibyl exhorts Aeneas to move on and to offer the Golden Bough to Proserpina.
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5. *Elysium* (637-892: 256 ll.)

a. Before revelations of Anchises (76 ll.)

637-668 (32 ll.)	Aeneas and the Sibyl visit Elysium and the blessed.
669-671 (3 ll.)	The Sibyl asks Musaeus where is Anchises to be found.
672-678 (7 ll.)	Musaeus replies and shows them the way.
679-686 (8 ll.)	Anchises is seen surveying grandsons still to be born.
687-694 (8 ll.)	Anchises addresses Aeneas.
695-698 (4 ll.)	Aeneas replies to Anchises.
699-702 (4 ll.)	Aeneas in vain tries to embrace his father.
703-712 (10 ll.)	Aeneas sees Lethe and the souls about to drink from it.

b. The revelations of Anchises (713-892: 180 ll.)

⁸ J. Warden (1999-2000), 351-355, comments on the parallelism that exists in the crossing of the Styx and the Lethe further on. These two passages of the Limbo/Tartarus and Elysium continue to offer several parallels in details encountered therein.

i. Conversation between Aeneas and Anchises about the souls in Elysium (713-722: 10 ll.).

ii. Philosophical Discourse (723-751: 29 ll.).

iii. Pageant of Heroes still to be born (752-887: 136 ll.).

752-755 (4 ll.)	Anchises shows Aeneas and the Sibyl a line of men still to be born again.
756-776 (21 ll.)	Anchises lists the kings of Alba Longa,
777-787 (11 ll.)	Romulus,
788-807 (20 ll.)	Julius Caesar and Augustus,
808-828 (21 ll.)	Roman kings and some heroes.
829-835 (7 ll.)	Roman civil wars.
836-846 (11 ll.)	Other Roman heroes.
847-853 (7 ll.)	The mission of Rome as distinguished from that of others.
854-859 (6 ll.)	Marcellus, the Conqueror.
860-866 (7 ll.)	Aeneas asks about the sad, young warrior.
867-887 (21 ll.)	Anchises talks about the young Marcellus.

iv. Revelation of immediate experiences (5 ll.)

888-892 (5 ll.)	Anchises reveals about immediate experiences Aeneas will go through.
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6. Exit from the Underworld (9 ll.)

893-901 (9 ll.)	Aeneas comes out from the Gate of Ivory, rejoins his comrades and sails to Caieta.
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The Sixth Book of the *Aeneid* is thus divided into **six parts**.⁹ The first and last part deal respectively with the arrival of the Trojans at Cumae and their departure to Caieta.¹⁰ Thus they form a *cyclus* of events in the same way as the first and last parts of *Aeneid* VIII which deal with Aeneas' preparations for war.¹¹ Within his stay at Cumae, Aeneas goes up to the temple of Apollo (*Part 2*), meets the Sibyl (*Part 3*), attends the funeral of Misenus (*Part 4*) and goes down to the Underworld (*Part 5*). Thus, apart from 2.44% he dedicates to the beginning and end of the book, Virgil dedicates considerably much more to the Underworld (69.37%) than to the rest (28.19%) which leads to it, being the Daedalus-scene, the Sibyl-scene and the Misenus-scene.

⁹ G.E. Duckworth (1961), 2-11, argues that Vergil follows Homer in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in dividing his epic in three parts. This tripartite division he also applies to every book of the *Aeneid*. The division of VI into three parts is commonly accepted by modern scholars, dividing the book into Preparation, Limbo/Tartarus and Elysium. See, for example, R.D. Williams (1964), 50, and K. Quinn (1968), 160-161.

¹⁰ S. Kyriakidis (1998), 41, refers to the beginning and end of VI as common to the notion of the Trojans' coming to port. Each part is outflanked in a chiasmic way by an epigrammatic piece, the beginning by the closure of V, and the end by the introduction of VII.

¹¹ H.C.R. Vella (2004), 2.

The preparation-scenes were purposely selected by the poet to be a gradual and significant introduction to the descent of Aeneas into the Underworld. Daedalus' ecphrasis appears on the door panels of the temple of Apollo, whose priestess the Sibyl is. Inside the temple, where the sacrifice of the seven bullocks and the seven sheep are to be held, the Sibyl will lay the conditions for Aeneas' descent: the burial of Misenus and the wrenching of the Golden Bough, which obligations are soon fulfilled.

The Underworld-scene itself is then subdivided into **five parts**, and here, also, the first four parts form another gradual and significant introduction to Aeneas' *ascent* to the *iugum* from where Aeneas will see Anchises and receive the important revelation which would fire him with new hopes for the future. These four scenes are the Entrance to the Underworld (*Section 1*), the Limbo (*Section 2*), Tartarus (*Section 3*) and the Presentation of the Golden Bough to Proserpina (*Section 4*). These are placed in this order by Vergil in accordance with the learning he received from Pythagorean and Platonic doctrines, and with Homeric tradition. Here also we have the *door* leading to Pluto's realm, where the Sibyl will make Aeneas pass through three stages before coming to Elysium: the no-man's land of eternal Limbo, the land of eternal punishments with the knowledge of no-way out (Tartarus), and the fulfilment of the obligation (the Golden Bough) to enter Elysium.

Thus, also here, one scene leads to the other. Aeneas is able to pass through Limbo; but while he is too *pious* to be able to enter Tartarus, he has been selected by Divine Will to place the Golden Bough on the doorstep of Proserpina's temple. Here, also, the presentation of the Golden Bough is the last act of Aeneas which will see him through to Elysium, as the wrenching of it took place before he set foot at the Underworld.

Finally, within Elysium itself we have first a description of the meeting of Aeneas with Anchises, and then a series of revelations which Anchises makes to Aeneas. In this latter section, we have **four parts**, each part being, once again, a gradual and significant introduction to the last scene: the revelation of the immediate experiences Aeneas will go through. To sustain his courage and hopes of this onset, that is, his coming to Latium, Aeneas receives information about the souls in Elysium (*Section 1*), and a philosophical grounding (*Section 2*) to understand the metempsychosis of the pageant of heroes (*Section 3*) queuing to be born Roman.

As this last section of Elysium precedes the last part of *Aeneid VI*, the exit from the Underworld and the sailing to Caieta, Vergil makes Anchises lead Aeneas to the Ivory Gate, a mystical element to combine with the other mystical element of the Golden Bough which appears in the section of Misenus' funeral, just before Aeneas' entrance into the Underworld, and which appears again in the section just preceding his entrance into Elysium. In all three sections, whether it is the Golden Bough or the Ivory Gate, Aeneas is accompanied by the Sibyl.

It has probably been already noticed from the above that Vergil here focuses on the *real issue* of Book VI by a pyramidal introduction to it. This real issue is the immediate war that awaits Aeneas outside the Underworld after he arrives at Caieta and the consequential marriage with Lavinia. In this choice of purpose of visiting the Underworld, Vergil imitates Homer in his *Odyssey XI*, where the real issue of his

consulting Teiresias (as Aeneas here consults Anchises) was how to get back to Ithaca. There, Odysseus was urged to do so by Circe, here Aeneas by the Sibyl.

The other revelations Aeneas receives, including that of Romans still to be born, are only meant to reinforce his determination to meet his original Destiny, the *Fatum* that since his setting from Troy Aeneas was constantly following, the visions of Hector and Creusa Aeneas never lost sight of. Those visions from outside the Underworld were enough to set Aeneas in motion; the present vision of Anchises in the Underworld is enough to kindle further that same motion to reach Latium and marry a queen there.

Conclusion

In a pyramidal way, Vergil has *six parts* making the whole book include the *five parts* constituting the Underworld, including, finally, the *four parts* of Anchises' revelations.¹² Since every section of every part leads to the next, and every last section of every part is a climax, the final climax of *Aeneid* VI may be said to be the successful exit from the Underworld and the coming to Caieta to meet with his Destiny.¹³

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¹² Although Vergil narrows the parts in their numbers as he approaches the end of the book, he still dedicates many more lines to Elysium than to Tartarus. See also J. Dion (1999), 332.

¹³ Other views about the climax of VI may be mentioned here. G.E. Duckworth (1961), 11, considers as climax 6.450-476, Aeneas' meeting with Dido. Indeed, he considers the climax of each book as the central part of its tripartite division; yet, a year later, the same author (1962), 10, opts as climax for the revelation of Rome's destiny by Anchises. B. Otis (1964), 218, sees the revelation of the Roman future as the climax.

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