

## Vergil's Voids

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Scilicet et tempus veniet, cum finibus illis  
agricola, incuruo terram molitus aratro,  
exesa inveniet scabra robigine pila  
aut gravibus rastris galeas pulsabit inanis  
grandiaque effossis mirabitur ossa sepulcris.

And know that a time will come, when in those fields  
A farmer, working the land with his curved plough,  
Will find javelins eaten with rusty mold,  
Or will strike empty helmets with his heavy hoe  
And marvel at gigantic bones in the unearthed graves.

VERGIL, *Georgics*

At contra nusquam apparent Acherusia temple  
nec tellus obstat quin omnia dispiciantur,  
sub pedibus quaecumque infra per inane geruntur.  
his ibi me rebus quaedam divina voluptas  
percipit atque horror, quod sic natura tua vi  
tam manifesta patens ex omni parte resecta est.

But, on the other hand, the quarters of Acheron are nowhere to be seen, nor yet is earth a barrier to prevent all things being descried, which are carried on underneath through the void below our feet. At these things, as it were, some godlike pleasure and a thrill of awe [or: horror] seizes on me, to think that thus by thy power nature is made so clear and manifest, laid bare to sight on every side.

LUCRETIUS, *On the Nature of Things*

Vacuums are nothings. We only mention them to let them know we know they're there.

*Anonymous fifth or sixth grader*

### Something about Nothing

This paper has its background in a few related projects. First, and most generally, it belongs to an overarching obsession in progress on conceptions of emptiness in classical literature. More immediately related are the remarks, from the Introduction to this volume, on the subject as void in classical antiquity. The aim of those remarks was to consider to what extent contemporary perspectives on the empty subject in psychoanalysis in a Lacanian vein are an inheritance of ancient views—thus reversing the worry about anachronism in psychoanalytic readings of ancient texts, a view that attributes far too much originality to the psychoanalytic framework and far too little complexity to the ancients. (Which is not to say that it *eliminates* the worry: the worry persists, if only in a new, displaced, and doubtless heightened form.) This paper is also connected to an essay of mine on Lucretius and the role played by *horror vacui* in his poem, both as a thematic and a structuring device.<sup>1</sup> The term *void* in my title, therefore, has resonances in each of these areas. *Void* refers generally to notions of the empty (vacuity) in Greek and Roman poets. It also refers to one aspect of this emptiness, whereby subjects in poetic settings—let us call them *some things*—become thinglike or phantasmatic and finally voided of substance—let us call them *nothings*. Among the many examples of this are Agamemnon eclipsed by death in Aeschylus's *Oresteia* trilogy; Helen in Stesichorus and in Gorgias; and Europa in Moschus, as she dissolves without remainder into her fantasy. And finally, *void* refers to the atomistic conception of void as found in Lucretius.<sup>2</sup>

Vergil, as an inheritor of the literary tradition, also inherits these three senses of *void*. And so, while it is tempting, when dwelling on the appearance of voids in Vergil, to read him from the start against his Roman Epicurean context, my topic will be straining somewhat against this narrow contextualization of Vergil's poetry. The hunt for specifically Lucretian echoes in Vergil, while valuable in itself, can do an injustice to the wealth of associations and allusions in Vergilian poetry. The Epicureans have no monopoly on the conception of void in antiquity, nor should we imagine that their conceptualizations are generally immune to prior poetic influence.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, broadening the search criteria for, say, Vergilian echoes of Lucretius or of Epicurus will have the advantage of shifting the focus away in part from an overly narrow understanding of Epicurean thinking. The result, I

hope, will be a richer picture of Vergil's negotiation of this tradition in his works, as well as a richer picture of this tradition itself.

That Vergil has an intimate familiarity with Epicureanism has been observed at least since Servius wrote his commentary on the *Aeneid*.<sup>4</sup> On the question as to *how* Vergil uses this tradition, in particular the Lucretian material, consensus has been harder to reach. To take just two recent examples: where Philip Hardie sees an anti-Lucretian turn in Vergil—a “remythologization” of Lucretius's demystified physical reductions (for instance, an affirmation of religion, piety, and order [*cosmos*], all in the name of *imperium*)—Viviane Mellinghoff-Bourgerie sees skepticism, uncertainty, and the vanity of human undertakings (“l'inanité”), all of this in line with Servius's arguments in a similar vein.<sup>5</sup> Hardie's focus is on meteorological and cosmological motifs, and on the aesthetics of the outsized (gigantomachy), the hyperbolic, the baroque, and the full (“Vergil's infinity is one of plenitude, not of emptiness”),<sup>6</sup> a fullness that borders on “claustrophobia.”<sup>7</sup> For Mellinghoff-Bourgerie, the poem's reality is psychological, not cosmic; hence her view of Aeneas as “un héros de la vie intérieure,” despite her recognition that his personality etiolates, or fades (“sa personnalité devienne de moins en moins active”), in what she calls “l'épanouissement de l'individu dans le bonheur parfait.”<sup>8</sup> Yet for all their divergences, these two scholars concur in seeing in Aeneas an incarnation of Epicurean virtue, a subject who is in complete rational self-control, withstanding the shocks of a painful world, ascendant like Epicurus himself in *De rerum natura*, and destined for a life among the stars, *extra flammantia moenia mundi*.<sup>9</sup>

There are problems, which we cannot examine here, with this last reading of personal identity from an Epicurean perspective. There are problems, too, with the readings that these two critics give to the two moments they see as exemplarily culminating the poem, the end of Book 12 and the end of Book 6, respectively. I find it hard to see in the final slaughter of Turnus much that reflects an Epicurean ideal of selfhood, a quiet, recessive passivity on the part of Aeneas, let alone “a journey to the heavens or the stars.”<sup>10</sup> And yet there are elements of both interpretations that one might want to preserve and adapt (with qualifications). A fresh start is needed—but also a detour, back to the *Georgics* and then further back to the epic tradition into which Vergil inserts his poem.

### The Death of the Subject and the Epic Unconscious: “Between the Two Deaths”

Consider the leading epigraph to this paper, which is taken from the *Georgics*. What is remarkable about this passage is the pathos with which it underscores the vanity of warfare, the contrasts that it develops in order to create this pathos (the peaceful, productive activity of tilling the soil, the corroded weapons that are forgotten until they are unearthed, the skulls suggested in silhouette by the helmets that once contained them and now are “empty”), and then, finally, the dangerously naïve fascination exerted by this appearance, or rather apparition: the dead are made into giants, outsized and contrasting with the limited horizon of the farmer’s vision (*finibus illis*). One could conceivably read the whole of the *Aeneid* through this single passage from the *Georgics*: all the paradoxes of the epic seem to be contained in these five lines. To ask whether this moment, a tragic epyllion in miniature, is a Lucretian one or not (and parallels have been noted<sup>11</sup>) seems beside the point. The disparities at work in this brief moment are a constant of the epic tradition that never ceased to stand back and look upon itself with a bemused reflexivity. Epic is always also counter-epic: it knows the futility of warfare, even as it knows that this futility is the source of the undying attractions, as it were, of war. Is this not the meaning of a “beautiful death”?<sup>12</sup> The beauty lies not in the accomplishment of any act but in the emptiness of the gesture, its utter uselessness; it is the sheer expenditure of life in its fullest flowering that draws us to epic heroes. They are, as we shall see in a moment, famous only when they no longer are. Epic brings these two timeframes—of contemporaneity and posterity—together in a single glimpse, in a shock of time that produces a beauty that may be less beautiful than it is sublime and, for the same reason, tinged with holowness.

This is why the recent quarrel that Bernard Williams has with Bruno Snell over the integrity of the Homeric self goes somewhat astray.<sup>13</sup> The problem in Homer is not whether the self is whole or fragmented (a false problem in any case, because what ought to be in question here is whether Homeric Greeks had access to the *fantasy* that they were unified wholes, and the issue is ultimately one not of empirical psychology but of literary aesthetics and stylization); rather, the real problem has to do with the redundancy of the self in Homer,

its disappearance as such. The Homeric poems are saturated with a sense of this redundancy. What they depict is not the tragedy of the individual but his dispensability. We might say that in this respect the Homeric poems are already Lucretian *avant la lettre*. Consider Lucretius's meditation on death from Book 3, in which Nature, addressing a frail old man "smitten in years," rudely reminds humans of their negligibility in the greater scheme of things: "Away hence with tears, thou rascal, set a bridle on thy laments. Thou hast enjoyed all the prizes of life and now dost waste away"; step aside from the banquet of life, your time is up, and so on. To this Lucretius adds:

The old ever gives place, thrust out by new things, and one thing must be restored at the expense of others: nor is any one sent down to the pit and to black Tartarus. There must needs be substance that the generations to come may grow . . . and life is granted to none for freehold, to all on lease. Look back again to see how the past ages of everlasting time, before we are born, have been as naught to us. These then nature holds up to us as a mirror of the time that is come, when we are dead and gone. Is there ought that looks terrible [*horribile*] in this, ought that seems gloomy? Is it not a calmer rest than any sleep? (3.955–77)

The passage is a tapestry of allusions and quotations, among which must surely figure the famous speech from *Iliad* 6 by the Trojan warrior Glaucus, who at first refuses to provide his genealogy in response to a request from the Greek hero Diomedes ("Who among mortal men are you, good friend . . . if you are one of those mortals who eat what the soil yields?"):

"High-hearted son of Tydeus, why ask of my generation?  
As is the generation of leaves, so is that of humanity.  
The wind scatters the leaves on the ground, but the live timber  
Burgeons with leaves again in the season of spring returning.  
So one generation of men will grow while another  
Dies." (6.145–50)

In Homer, heroes *are* to the extent that they are no more, are remembered, have a name (won by exploits and above all by a "beautiful death"). But here Glaucus is casting that logic, so to speak, to the

wind: memory is no defense against meaninglessness, and what is the use of genealogy in the face of the nullity of generations (made null by sheer repetition) and the absurdity of death? What is shown here is the illogic of the epic illusion: Glaucus's gesture is as defiant, and even as nihilistic, as Achilles' refusal to obey the logic of the epic code: "Yet why must the Argives fight with the Trojans?" (9.337).<sup>14</sup> Additionally, this refusal of memory by Glaucus touches the very medium in which the poems were recorded and recited (by way of oral composition), which is to say the very condition of Homeric memory itself.

The Homeric heroes of the *Iliad* not only fight in the shadow of death, they also live in a condition "between the two deaths." Shortly after the scene from Book 6 just quoted, Hector echoes Glaucus's words (which he cannot have heard but nonetheless knows very well) in a speech to Andromache:

"For I know this thing well in my heart, and my mind knows it:  
There will come a day when sacred Ilion shall perish,  
And Priam, and the people of Priam of the strong ash spear."  
(6.447–49)

This is a moment we might call "Vergilian," thinking back on the quotation from the *Georgics*. But there is more. Predicting the outcome of the war, Hector imagines himself dead (6.459). Hector proceeds to battle, Andromache retires to her chambers, and together with her handmaidens sounds a dirge, like a benediction over a corpse: "So they mourned in his house over Hector *while he was living still . . .*" (6.500). Hector is effectively dead, as much for those around him as he necessarily is for the audience. The only exception, the one person who does not quite realize this fact about Hector (who knows it but refuses to acknowledge it), is Hector himself.<sup>15</sup> Hector's real death will coincide with the moment when he makes this realization and concedes its force; at that moment he will bow to the consciousness of the epic itself. Until then, he goes on existing in the realm between two deaths, suspended in a state of disavowed consciousness that is best summed up by the formula, "I know very well that I am supposed to be dead, but nevertheless I will go on acting as though I am not."<sup>16</sup> The lessons of Hector can be extended to all of the actors of the *Iliad*: effectively dead, they go on acting as if they were alive. Is that not the real tragedy of epic?<sup>17</sup>

At the extreme, wherever this greater knowing catches up with the characters' normal, operative state of unknowing, epic reality shades off into unreality. Agents find themselves acting "as in a dream," as Hector does in the fruitless attempt to elude Achilles' pursuit around the walls of Troy (*Il.* 22.199). Or, they find themselves in a counterfactual existence, as does Helen in the *Teichoscopia*, in her address to Priam:

"I wish bitter death had been what I wanted, when I came hither  
Following your son, forsaking my chamber, my kinsmen . . .  
It did not happen that way: and now I am worn with weeping.  
. . . *Did this ever happen?*" (*Il.* 3.173–80)

The last tag, which casts doubt on the whole of the epic—not only on the reality that leads up to the present moment *but also including the present moment*—is more teasingly phrased in the Greek original: εἴ ποτ' ἔην γε, literally, "if indeed these things ever were," or, more poignantly, if remotely, "*if indeed I ever existed.*"<sup>18</sup> The confession is alarming, not least of all because if Helen does not now exist, was never married to Agamemnon, was never abducted by Paris to Troy, then the Trojan war is pointless indeed, being fought over a phantom object. And what could be more meaningless than that?

Later poetic tradition, beginning with the lyric poet Stesichorus and then carried on by Euripides (in his play *Helen*) and arguably by Gorgias, draws this very conclusion. Far from proposing an alternative to the epic tradition, as though developing a narrative possibility unexplored by Homer, this later tradition in fact constitutes a powerful counterfactual reading of the Homeric poem and offers an express commentary on it. More precisely, it makes into its exclusive theme a thread that was already in place in Homer, and one that unravels all that the Homeric epics purport to establish.<sup>19</sup> In this later continuation (rather than revision) of the Homeric tradition, Helen at Troy is called an *eidōlon*, or phantom image of herself, representing a confection of projected desire: "That story [known from Homer] is not true, and you did not go on the well-benched ships and you did not reach the citadel of Troy" (Plato, *Phdr.* 243a). Now, the term *eidōlon*, before it gets taken over by the Greek atomists to designate simulacral reality (secondary appearances given off by configurations of real atoms and void), is Homeric in its origins. Used in the *Odyssey*

to signify shades of the departed or images appearing in dreams, its earliest appearance in Greek is in *Iliad* 5, where Apollo saves Aeneas from the onslaught of Diomedes by whisking him off the battlefield to the safety of his own temple in Pergamus. Meanwhile, Apollo fashions a decoy, an *eidōlon* “in the likeness of Aineias himself and in armour like him, and all about this image brilliant Achaians and Trojans hewed at each other”:

But he of the silver bow, Apollo, fashioned an image [*eidōlon*]  
 In the likeness of Aineias himself and in armour like him,  
 And all about this image brilliant Achaians and Trojans  
 Hewed at each other, and at the ox-hide shields strong circled  
 Guarding men’s chests, and at the fluttering straps of the guard-  
 skins.<sup>20</sup> (*Il.* 5.450–54)

The vanity of battle and the nihilism of epic are here condensed into but five lines: so much fury over a mere nothing! It is clear (although I am unaware of anyone who has said so) that Stesichorus must have taken his cue from these very verses, from this Homeric potentiality, and put them at the center of his poem. Compare Plato, *Rep.* 586c: “Just as Helen’s phantom [*eidōlon*], according to Stesichorus, was fought over by the warriors at Troy in ignorance of the truth. . . .” We shall see how Vergil remembers this moment from Homer, but in his own way. At any rate, in Stesichorus we cannot even clearly say that Helen at Troy is a simulacrum of herself, because there is no evidence that he takes her to be anything beyond this phantasm, this fiction of a literary identity,<sup>21</sup> whereas in Homer she represents no more or less than the veiled threat of her own impossibility. My point is simply that agents in the Homeric tradition down to the fifth century B.C.E. can stare deeply into the abyss of meaning and into their own phantasmatic existence. It is this sense of the self as image or phantasm, a something that is nothing, that gets preserved in the later tradition too.

### **Aeneas Inanis: The Aesthetics of Irreality**

*Qui sommes-nous? Nous voyons en nous quelque chose de compact avec des qualités et des défauts, des traits de caractère qui forment un personnalité, et que nous regardons du dehors, que nous trouvons généralement aimable et*

*agréable. Tandis que si nous nous plaçons au niveau où je me place . . . il n'y a pas d'identité.*

NATHALIE SARRAUTE (quoted in Simone Benmussa, *Entretiens avec Nathalie Saurraute*)

tu vero dubitabis et indignabere obire?  
mortua cui vita est prope iam vivo atque videnti.

Wilt thou then hesitate and chafe to meet thy doom? thou, whose  
life is well nigh dead while thou still livest and lookest on the light.

LUCRETIUS, *On the Nature of Things*

Vergil wrote a generation after Lucretius, but the presence of the Lucretian worldview looms large in his works, most visibly in his *Georgics*, but no less significantly in the *Aeneid*, the poem of concern in this section. A few comments on this worldview are in order, which is nothing if not contested. What kind of vision is represented by a passage like the following?

And yet a pool of water not deeper than a single finger-breadth, which lies between the stones on the paved street, affords us a view beneath the earth to a depth as vast as the high gaping mouth [*hiatus*] of heaven stretches above the earth; so that you seem to look down on the clouds and the heaven and bodies hidden in the sky beneath the earth—all in magic wise [*mirande*]. (Lucretius 4.414–19)

A pool of water, no deeper than your finger, catches the image of “a depth as vast as the high gaping mouth of heaven stretches above the earth.” To put the question in a way that P. T. Wiseman once attempted in his biographical inquiry, “The Two Worlds of Lucretius,” what qualifications does it take to see depths in a surface? Quite simply, one has to be a bit of an Epicurean and all too human to have this kind of vision. It is available to each and every one of us. Lucretius’s example appears in a list of optical illusions, but surely the greatest optical illusion is that presented by the world as we perceive it on a day-to-day basis.<sup>22</sup> Our senses continually read off the surface of phenomena-appearances that reflection and science can serve to correct. But equally to the point, Lucretius’s comment on perceptual fallacy here is deflationary in the extreme: not only do phenomena conceal greater (if terrifying) depths beyond, but those regions beyond—charged with indefinite aesthetic, psychological, and even metaphysical significance—are in these verses

themselves of an illusory cast, a mere image. Grandeur, sublime heights and depths, and vast expanses of heaven and earth, conjuring up beauties and horrors and reverential awe (*horror ac voluptas*), are all vitiated by a mere puddle. Which has more truth to it, the image or its source? Lucretius here graphically makes a point that he elsewhere makes explicitly: “A little thing can give a picture of great things and afford traces of a concept” (2.123–24). His point, on the surface a pretty picture, is in fact a deeply conceptual one; but above all, it is a deeply unsettling one. Our minds tend to read into phenomena what is not really there.<sup>23</sup> This is why, when we are faced with passages like the following, we have to be on our guard:

Unless perchance, when you see your legions swarming over the spaces of the Campus and provoking a mimic war [*belli simulacra cientis*], when you draw them up equipped with arms, all alike eager for the fray, strengthened with hosts in reserve and forces of cavalry, when you see the army wandering far and wide in busy haste, then alarmed by all this the scruples of religion fly in panic from your mind, and the dread of death then leaves your heart empty and free from care. (Lucretius 2.40–45; cf. 2.324)

The temptation is to take *belli simulacra* (a contested bit of text mainly because it is so boldly vague) in one of two ways: either as referring to legionary exercises (“mimic war,” so Bailey), or as referring to “real war” (so Wiseman, who is puzzled by the phrase and then leaves it behind, satisfied to have located the reality of war despite Lucretius’s language).<sup>24</sup> The question to ask here is, In what sense is real warfare simulacral? In exactly the same sense, I would suggest, as a puddle’s illusory reflection. A better question to ask might be, In what sense is simulated war real? Lucretius’s language suggests a painting, not a reality: it makes reality into a canvas (it is unclear why *belli simulacra* cannot carry this sense here<sup>25</sup>), in exactly the same way that all of perception presents itself as an aesthetic object to Lucretius, whether of beauty or of horror—two responses we have, as it were, on loan, given that neither is a properly scientific response to the way things are.<sup>26</sup> We need only think back to the beginning of Book 2 (“Sweet is it . . . to behold great contests of war in full array over the plains, when you have no part in the danger”); or to the lesson drawn soon after that: “Ah! miserable minds of men, blind hearts! in what dark-

ness of life, in what great dangers ye spend this little span of years!," feeding the vanity of greed, possession, and power; or to the image, likewise from the same book (2.115–22), of particles of dust in the light, warring furiously and vainly like atoms in the void; or back to Book I, where we learn that time is not real (*tempus per se non est*), but is only a feeling (*sensus*) derived from things, and consequently "the rape of Tyndarus's daughter" or "the vanquishing of the Trojan tribes in war" are not real either but only "said to be" (*cum dicunt esse*, 2.464–65).<sup>27</sup> Lucretius's last point about *res gestae* is general in scope: doings and events, in themselves, are nothing at all. His philosophical vision evacuates the reality that we think we intuitively know and understand, even as that vision seeks to anchor this reality in the reassuring bedrock of physics (atoms and void). The Epicurean vision, inherited from Democritus, enacts what might be called a "derealization" of reality.

I want to suggest that Vergil's *Aeneid* follows Lucretius in this very way. The reality it depicts is consistently derealized for the agents in the poem and consequently for the readers who stand in an analogous position to those agents, as witnesses twice removed: as the poem's agents, bodies, and places are made to seem unreal, we ourselves are distantiated, are rendered strangers to what we look upon, mere spectators of a canvass whose properties as a canvass have more presence, palpability, and reality to them than the figures painted on it. To Hardie's (strangely Hellenistic) aesthetics of the baroque and hyperbolic, and to Mellinshoff-Bourgerie's tentative aesthetics of the uncertain and the skeptical, I want to oppose a different aesthetic as I see it in Vergil's epic: a resolute *aesthetics of irreality*, which may be located in the dissociative consciousness that pervades the poem. In Lucretius, this ambivalent attitude to what is gains cogency from the fact that atomic reality is not only in some vital sense more real than appearances, but also more realistically drawn, more animated than life itself.<sup>28</sup> In Vergil, this attitude transpires behind the shelter of epic fiction, but it also taps into the derealizing aesthetic tendencies of the epic genre (as I suggested earlier). Thus, when in Book 2 Venus reveals to Aeneas the divine machinery of warfare in operation at Troy<sup>29</sup> (where, as Lucretius would say, "nature is made so clear and manifest, laid bare to sight on every side"), it is a mistake to see, with Hardie, a remythologization of Lucretius: "Aeneas . . . sees behind [the scrim of appearances] to the *reality* of the destroying gods."<sup>30</sup> The accent needs

to be done exactly the other way around. The picture presented of gods controlling human affairs works to render *unreal* the wars being waged and the achievements of human agency. But just how “real” are the underlying causes here? This brings us back to Lucretius’s *belli simulacra* again, but also to wars waged in the name of a simulacrum like Helen. (Aeneas is, at the moment of revelation in the scene just mentioned, prepared, in fact, to kill Helen. But Venus, luminous, intervenes with her blindingly clear view of things, in a language that recalls Lucretius’s rendering of Epicurean *enargeia*, as if to prevent him from trifling over a phantom.) Yet we are also, I suggest, put in mind of *Iliad* 5 and Aeneas’s first appearance in Greek literature, which we saw also coincides with the first occurrence of the term *eidōlon* in the Greek language.<sup>31</sup> There, at the near fatal conclusion of his first *aristeia*, or heroic display, poised literally between the two deaths (“now in this place Lord Aineas might have perished had not Venus . . .” [5.311–12]), Aeneas (dis)appears, precisely, as a simulacrum: “Aineias himself and . . . armour like him” (αὐτῶ τ’ Αἰνεΐα ἵκελον καὶ τεύχεσι, the phrase “him and his armor” being a *hapax* in Homer). Vergil begins his poem here: *arma virumque*.<sup>32</sup> And this brings us to the much-debated issue of Aeneas’s characterization.

The question has been frequently asked: Is Aeneas a hero or only the “shadow” of one?<sup>33</sup> Frail and human, afflicted with anxieties rather than being bold and larger than life, Aeneas seems more of a hysteric than a hero. And yet Pound’s quip (“Ach, a hero, him a hero? Bigob, I t’ought he waz a priest”<sup>34</sup>) captures one of the most disquieting features of Aeneas: his complete subservience to a divine mission—the founding of Rome and its terrible *imperium*—in the guise of pious devotion. Does not this behavior fit to a T the Lacanian definition of the pervert? An agent of the universal, Aeneas realizes his life-project in becoming the instrument of the *jouissance* of the Other, and that is the source of his “piety,” even if only in the mode of disavowed awareness: “I do not head for Italy of my own free will, spontaneously [*non sponte*].’ . . . But pious Aeneas . . . nonetheless acted out the commands of the gods” (4.360, 393–96).<sup>35</sup> Where the hysteric, trapped in the dialectical economy of desire, continually asks, “What does the Other want of me?,” or else doubts his qualifications either as a leader (“Am I really up to the task of being the master for my people?”) or as an agent of destiny (“Why me?”), the pervert’s mistake lies in a short-circuiting of desire, in his assuming that he *knows* what the desire of the Other is

(despite its being an illusion): he consequently identifies his own enjoyment with that of the Other.<sup>36</sup> Here Lacan draws some interesting ideological conclusions that bear upon Vergil's poem. If the hysteric is a politically subversive agent, forever putting questions of legitimacy in doubt (however much psychic consolation he derives from this game), by contrast the pervert is politically retrograde.<sup>37</sup> Not merely the blind tool of power and a model of unquestioning obedience, unlike the forever doubting and ideologically subversive figure of the hysteric, the pervert actually believes in his devotion. Worse still, in stripping himself of all traces of pathological motivation, the pervert approximates to the agent of pure moral duty, pursuing its categorical imperatives with an impersonality that is beyond reproach, and terrifyingly so. Book 12 of the *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas enacts his final revenge upon Turnus and fatefully establishes the *imperium* of Rome, can be read in this light.

From a Lacanian perspective, what is (or rather, ought to be) so disturbing about this form of subjectivity is that the subject who so completely assumes his symbolic mandate in this "interpassive" way, without reinvesting it with pathological traits (whence his purely formal resolve), becomes a star example of the subject in its most abstract and purest form: rather than pursuing an object of desire, the subject here coincides, unconsciously, with the itinerary of drive itself.<sup>38</sup> This resemblance between Lacan's version of the Freudian subject and the Kantian moral subject takes us momentarily aback.<sup>39</sup> But then again, it would be wrong to assume that being a subject (\$) is an admirable condition, one that we should aim at attaining (even if it is a choice we are ultimately not free to make<sup>40</sup>)—although on this point Lacan again seems to vacillate. When it comes to contrasting the ethics of drive with the ethics of desire, Lacan often prefers the former (Antigone's sublimation of her identity, her creation *ex nihilo* of herself, is a case in point), even though elsewhere he seems to acknowledge that subject formation occurs in no other way than through medium of \$, the bar of subjectivity, for, as he says, subjects just are a creation *ex nihilo*, a construction out of a void—they retroactively cause themselves.<sup>41</sup> This uncertainty aside, far from being an admirable quality, the voiding of the subject, its radical destitution, is quite to the contrary a *necessary* condition of subjecthood, one that no one can help but instantiate, whether in the very attempt to flee it (Oedipus) or else in the attempt to approach it, assuming it is a condition one can will. (Antigone wills an act, and in doing so commits "symbolic sui-

cide”; but the act is ethical only insofar as what she wills is not her self-voiding but the voiding of the symbolic order represented by Creon’s laws.) To put this in a different way: in its pure form the subject as void is a necessary, and necessarily unintentional, byproduct as well as coefficient of subjectivity: subjects come about in no other way. (Thus, one cannot will one’s self-voiding, but only indirectly cause it.) Aeneas, in his particularly Roman empty contours, is therefore also *exemplary*. Expressions of selfhood—subjective styles or pathologies (identities)—automatically follow in the wake of this voiding of the subject, which is either fleetingly attained (in the rarest moments of symbolic breakdown) or permanently recessed (“repressed”) in the structure of the subject. That they do so is a symptom of subjective identity itself.

If \$ (the barred subject) indicates the ways in which subjects come to be formed, it further points to the ideological kernel of a given social formation. Locating the position of the barred subject in a given symbolic formation is the way psychoanalysis most effectively discovers the underpinnings of ideology—its mechanisms and its forms of “passionate” attachment (whatever it is that makes a subject cling to a social signifying formation), just as a subject’s return, or rather approach, to the condition of \$ inevitably throws up the conditions of ideology in a violent display. Confronting subjects with (in Lacan’s language) the “real” of their identities in all of its perversity can be ideologically destabilizing, but nothing guarantees that it will be this, or rather nothing guarantees what forms this destabilization will take or the lasting nature of its effects. Perhaps that is why Vergil’s poem has just as often been read as a critique of Roman *imperium* as it has been taken to be a celebration of Rome’s cause(s). This variety of responses to the poem has a structural cause that lies not in the nature of poetic language or in some fundamental political ambivalence in Vergil, but in the structure of subjectivity itself in its contingent historical conditions: to be a subject is to be caught up in the dilemmas of ideology; to be a Roman subject is to be rent by Roman ideologies. These divergences of reading and interpretation are due, in other words, to the necessarily traumatic character of the ideological (or “pre-ideological”) kernel at the core of (here) Roman rule, which is permanently on display in the poem.

Insofar as it is “about” anything at all, the *Aeneid* is, quite simply, about the construction of an ideological edifice. But it is also about

Aeneas, who occupies an impossible set of positions with respect to this edifice. He is, on the one hand, the exemplary “hailed” subject, interpellated into a symbolic role (his “mandate”) within a system of social and political relations (not all of them yet fully realized), an interpellation that is ritually repeated daily by all Romans in the historical present of the poem’s telling and by their ancestors in the historical present of the poem. On the other hand, in the erection of this regime Aeneas occupies the place of its “vanishing mediator” (mythical founding father) who must pass into the abstract conditions of political possibility (must be eliminated) if “Rome” is to exist with any degree of consistency. Aeneas cannot consistently fulfill both of these expectations at once, and his subjectivity is therefore located at the point of failure in this crossing of symbolic and imaginary mandates. Aeneas, the exemplary barred and voided subject—that is, the failed intersection of these two mandates—coincides with his passing from view and into the Real of Rome, that which in Rome is more real than anything Rome can propose to itself in its various self-expressions. And this Real-ization is the source of his derealization.

Facing the traumatic Real of ideology is no simple matter: it is as easy to shun the spectacle and avert one’s gaze from it as it is to revel in its fascination (which is just another form of aversion, namely, a fetishization). So how does Vergil’s poem get us to confront or experience the Real of Rome? Paradoxically, through the failure to do so. Just as Rome’s Real exists in a reader’s failed encounter with it, so too does Aeneas embody this failure in his “person.” Look as we might for the Real of Rome in Aeneas, we will not find it: Aeneas’s character, I would suggest, does not contain any such Real, and if anything the multiple forms in which Aeneas comes to be figured in the poem and then interpreted by its readers (typically, either as a hysteric or a pervert) are illustrative of the ways in which that Real comes to be eluded rather than encountered in all of its bruising immediacy. The Real, such as it is, is to be found on another level of *experience* (rather than on a level of *reading*), in a series of missed encounters. The first of these is to do with Aeneas’s character—or rather his lack of one. The rest are to do with the loss of reality that accompanies the poem as it unfolds. We may consider these in turn.

Who, or what, is Aeneas? Presented as an (admittedly small) bundle of attributes and ascribed character traits—features that he has, not in virtue of his possessing them so much as he is represented

as having them—Aeneas is altogether lacking in any essential qualities we might call his own. Superficially, he is a kind of polytropic *Outis* (Nobody). This is his most “Odyssean” side, even if it also entails that he can take on, depending on one’s perspective, the features of a “second Achilles” (6.89) or a “second Paris” (4.215; 7.321). Elsewhere he appears as a Hector, an Apollo, a Danaan (Greek), and in other identities as well, although never explicitly as an Odysseus—and in this respect he is more Odyssean than Odysseus himself. It is not so much that “Vergil’s hero . . . keeps much hidden from us; and even what he reveals does not always add up,” as Mark Griffith writes in an article that addresses the shrewd question, “What Does Aeneas Look Like?”<sup>42</sup> It is rather that Aeneas (or Vergil) has nothing to hide. His identity is no secret, if it counts for anything at all, and it is best summed up in his own Odyssean tautology from Book 1: “The man you seek is here” (1.595). Except, he is not “here” at all. Ludwig Wittgenstein once was troubled by this dilemma of identity:

Imagine a language in which, instead of saying “I found nobody in the room,” one said “I found Mr. Nobody in the room.” Imagine the philosophical problems which would arise out of such a convention. Some philosophers brought up in this language would probably feel that they didn’t like the similarity of the expressions “Mr. Nobody” and “Mr. Smith.” (69)

Aeneas is very like Mr. Nobody. The reference to “Aeneas” is not empty; it points unerringly to the emptiness that surrounds and envelops Aeneas.

The first and natural response to this dilemma of characterization is to assume that Aeneas is nothing but a fictional construct, an artifact of art and a highly wrought emblem born of the self-conscious aesthetic of Roman neotericism. The “fabrication” of his appearance in Book 1 by Venus (his mythological mother, and here the literal *Aeneadum genetrix*) is a typical moment in this line of reasoning, but one that strictly speaking is *de rigueur* in the epic tradition, at least since the *Odyssey*. At most, then, we might want to affirm Aeneas’s generic, that is to say epic, identity. But there is more to the problem than that. Aeneas, we have to say, is not a mere passive receptacle of subjectivation; he is not simply “made” or made up. On the contrary,

he is the retroactive product of his own reflection in a fictional medium—a baffling experience for himself, to be sure—and he develops a sense of purpose and an identity in response to his own image as it comes to him from without. The key moments are not the scenes of Aeneas's fabrication of the kind just noted, but in his encounters with his own alter ego, for instance earlier in the same book where he discovers (himself in or as) another work of art, this time the frieze of Dido's palace and its depictions of the Trojan War:

He sees the wars of Troy set out in order:  
 The battles famous now through all the world. . . .  
 He halted. As he wept, he cried: "Achates [his companion] . . .  
 Forget your fears;  
 This fame will bring you some deliverance."  
 He speaks. With many tears and sighs he feeds  
 His soul on what is nothing but a picture. (1.456–65)

Not many lines later, Aeneas, scanning the same monument, not only relives the trauma of the recent past but discovers himself: "He also recognized himself [*se quoque . . . agnouit*] in combat with [*permixtum*—more literally, because it helps to objectify him even further, 'mixed in amongst'] / the Achaean chiefs" (1.464–87).

The trouble is that Aeneas cannot truly be said to recognize himself here because, as we have already been reminded, he is feeding his soul on what is but an "empty picture": *sic ait atque animum pictura pascit inani* (1.464). In what sense can Aeneas be said to recognize himself? All depends on where we place the *se* that he recognizes and identifies, that is, whether we locate it in himself or in the picture. The identification must in any case be dialectical: seeing himself in the picture, he recognizes from the picture who he is. And yet there is something hollow, even unreal, about this act of recognition, and indeed about the entire scene. The picture is "empty," after all—very like, shall we add, the fame that, Aeneas assures his companion Achates, will issue from their undertaking? (Certainly their fame can be no more substantial than that proclaimed by the image of Troy: the image just is what fame is.) Indeed, at this moment Troy is being reduced to an image, its reality effectively annulled (with clear Lucretian echoes):<sup>43</sup> Vergil is framing and bracketing the epic tradition, and founding his own epic upon this self-conscious relation to earlier artifice—a gesture

that does not, however, make the *Aeneid* more “full.” And Aeneas is drawn into the same circle.

Aeneas claims to see himself. Would anyone else recognize him? “Mixed in amongst the Achaeans” suggests the possibility that he is pictured in disguise *as* an Achaean (2.389), a stratagem that, likewise described on the frieze, had cost Aeneas dearly (he calls it an *error* [2.413], because of the lives that were lost) and that ultimately failed: the Achaeans eventually learned to unmask the disguised Trojans (*agnoscunt*, 2.423). Quandaries of identity in the poem are thus mirrored in the image—assuming these two levels of representation can be distinguished. The narrative voice and the narrated voice are crucially elided here, which allows us to ask whether Aeneas sees himself as full or as empty (*inanis*). Is that the source of the scene’s pathos (and Aeneas’s tears: *multa gemens . . . sunt lacrima rerum*)? Is Aeneas even depicted on the frieze?<sup>44</sup> Whether or not he is (how could we tell?), he effectively is, and that is all that matters. Either way he is present in effigy only; and since he cannot perceive himself *qua* the effigy that he is—a recognition that is barred (it is too traumatic for him, especially in his strong desire to see himself in the frieze)—he misreads himself in Carthage as being present, as do others around him. *Aeneas is absent even in his presence*, yet unrecognizably so to himself and to others (which is a crueler, and more accurately Lacanian, truth than the habitual argument about something being “present in its absence”). Thus, it is the object that seems to see and identify the subject, the way a mirror sees the one looking upon it, and the way a gaze locates a subject’s desire.<sup>45</sup> A further complication: the image is seductive, and it is this picture of Aeneas that will inflame the heart of Dido, more so than the reality of Aeneas (4.1–5). Does Dido “choose” Aeneas precisely because he is nothing but this absence (or its representative), a thing of nothing? If so, then he answers to the truth of her desire perfectly. Her desire is in any case staged as if it stood in relation to a picture, and more specifically as a relationship between two absences: *illum absens absentem auditque videtque* (“Absent, she hears and sees him, the absent one,” 4.83). Is Aeneas, with his soul feeding on nothing, in any sense fuller than the picture of himself, whether the one he sees or the one Dido sees? In one sense he obviously is not fuller than his image: he is himself but a picture, and it is the reader who is feeding her mind on an empty representation. In another, Aeneas gains identity only in

relation to an image that he must put on and, as it were, wear (like armor). Vergil never allows the reader to evade the consequences of this insight, and in fact he seems to take every opportunity to remind her of it. The effects, presented here in Book 1 as identificatory and as a key moment of recognition, are alienating indeed.

An obvious objection here would be to say that all we are being pointed to is something very common after all, namely, the literary fabrication of Aeneas. What is so unique about that? Are not all literary characters equally fictional, insubstantial, mere products of a figuration, easily reducible to their simulacral status? No doubt they are, but the way in which they are made to assume their figurative status within their fictional worlds varies greatly from fiction to fiction (possibly also from genre to genre). While it is true that readers have the discretionary power to reduce characters to a fiction, this tells us nothing about how the characters of fiction are presented, either as perceiving their own status or as perceived from within the works in which they appear: the reducibility of a character to an empty fiction is a difference in perspective that may or may not be enforced from within a literary work.<sup>46</sup> The far greater objection, however, ought to be the obverse situation to the purely formal, poetic consideration: Is not the fact that subjects can be so easily de-psychologized, emptied of their subjective fullness and reduced to the flat screen of their fantasies, on the contrary an all too common feature of “real” subjects? If the decentering of the subject is the very definition of the Freudian subject, the subject’s destitution, its voiding, constitutes the very foundation of the Lacanian subject. And so it would also seem that the decision by a reader to reduce characters to a fiction, which is in itself merely tautological, is all the easier to make inasmuch as it reassures readers of their own *nonfictional* status, and defends them against the far more troubling possibility, namely, that fictions can be, in this precise sense, truer than reality.

The problem, in other words, is not that Aeneas, in his exposure as a creature who is “less than himself,” becomes too much of a fiction but, on the contrary, that he becomes all too familiarly *real*, too little a fiction and too much of a (barred) subject, too exemplary a reminder of the ordinary constitution of actual subjectivity. And that, perhaps, is the clue to his strangeness. He is too uncannily familiar to be reabsorbed back into the world of fiction from which he emerged: he “sticks out” of that world as a disturbing excess of fiction, but also

from our own “normalized” world of reality. Aeneas is thus in different ways very like the psychotic who, cured of his delusion that he is a grain of corn and asked by his analyst whether he finally feels cured, replies in a terrified voice, “Yes, I feel fine and am definitely cured. But does the *hen* know that I am not a grain of corn?” Cured of his psychosis, he has become a (saner) neurotic who no longer doubts who he is because his identity is henceforth staked on the uncertain knowledge of what he is for the Other. The only question remaining for him is this: Does the Other know what I am? The joke is relevant here, if for the *hen* we substitute not only the characters around Aeneas from the poem (Dido, Anchises, Ascanius, and so on) but also the reader of the poem herself.<sup>47</sup>

Now to the loss of reality. Saturated with literary memory, the world of Aeneas is heavily symbolic. It is freighted with supernatural signs, with ghosts, apparitions, and hauntings, with false mental images and effigies, like a brain on fire, caught up in a nightmare that is more real than reality—or else in a distinctively Lucretian nightmare, in which simulacra are more real, more tangible, and more substantial, than reality itself, copies that, as it were, have displaced their originals.<sup>48</sup> Nor can Aeneas be fully dissociated from these images himself, struggle as he might to do so. When he appears a mere image to others, as he often does, Aeneas will assert, his voice “broken” and nearly “failing” him, his mouth “agape”: “Do not doubt—I am real” (*et raris turbatus vocibus hisco: / ‘ne dubita, nam vera vides,’* 3.315–16). Surely the most astonishing moment in this series of simulacra, which includes the effigy of Aeneas that is mounted on a pyre by Dido in Book 4 (and that eerily recapitulates the opening verse of the poem: *arma viri . . .* [4.495–508]), comes in the conclusion to Book 6, the symbolic midpoint of the poem, where Aeneas, himself a virtual shade, emerges from the Underworld through the gates of Sleep. There are two gates, one of horn given to true shades to exit from, the other of polished ivory, through which “the Spirits send false dreams into the world above.” Oddly enough, it is the latter exit through which Anchises sends his son (along with the Sibyl) back to the shoals of light (6.893–99).<sup>49</sup>

The choice between the two gates has long been a source of embarrassment to scholarship. Some commentators hold that the choice is forced: Aeneas is not a true shade; the way marked by horn is therefore barred to him, and so he goes the way of . . . false dreams.<sup>50</sup> But even

odder is the fact that the choice is posed at all. We think back to the initial, reassuring contrast in the encounter with Charon earlier in the same book, to the solid body of Aeneas and the empty shades he displaces. Yet even this contrast is delusive. Does it not involve us in the inane calculation of just how many shades Aeneas's body weight equals?<sup>51</sup> Nor is this the last time that Aeneas appears as a rare, empty image. And in other contexts a virtual echo effect is created between his name, *Aeneas*, and the word for vacuity, *inanis*.<sup>52</sup>

In Book 10, Juno fashions a phantom-Aeneas—a shade (*umbra*) and image (*imago*) of him out of a cloud of air—in order to delude Turnus and to lead him away from Aeneas and from a certain death. The moment is a re-creation of *Iliad* 5 (see above), as Juno earlier reminds Jupiter and the reader (10.79–82),<sup>53</sup> a re-creation that strangely puts Aeneas into a new relation with Helen:

Then out of insubstantial mist [*nube caue*] the goddess  
 Fashions a phantom [lit., “shade”: *umbram*], thin and powerless [*sine*  
*viribus*],  
 That has Aeneas' [*Aeneae*] shape (astounding sight)  
 And wears the Dardan's arms [*telis*]: she imitates  
 The shield and helmet of his godly head  
 And gives it empty words [*inania*] and sound that has  
 No meaning [*sine mente*], and she counterfeits his gait;  
 Like forms that—it is said—hover when death  
 Has passed, or dreams that cheat the sleeping senses. (10.636–42)<sup>54</sup>

*Arma virumque*, or *sine armis viribusque*? It makes no difference, for Turnus takes the bait and chases the cloud image. He believes that Aeneas has lost heart in flight: “His mind [*animo*], / bewildered, he drinks in empty [*inanem*] hope: / ‘Where are you off to, Aeneas [*Aenea*]?’” (10.647–49).<sup>55</sup>

The three-way echoes between *inanis*, *animus*, and *Aeneas* are reinforced elsewhere in the poem. The effigy of Aeneas set aflame by Dido in Book 4 eerily recapitulates the opening verse of the poem (*arma viri . . .*, 4.495),<sup>56</sup> which likewise notably fails to name Aeneas (*arma virumque cano*), whose existence must be inferred either from the conjunction of “arms” and “man” or (arguably) from their disjunction. It is worth comparing *arma procul currusque virum miratur inanis* (6.651), where Aeneas is gaping at the phantom arms and chariots of the

Underworld dead, and which recalls the epigraph from the *Georgics*.<sup>57</sup> We have already seen how Aeneas's *animus* fed on empty images in Book 2. And the poem ends on an identical note, in a nightmarish scene that involves the two protagonists, Turnus and Aeneas, in a terrible and mutual loss of reality. In their final, fateful encounter, Turnus tears up an immense and ancient (*antiquus*) boundary stone lying in the plain, formerly held by peaceable farmers (a symbolic act that likewise puts us in mind of the *Georgics* passage), and hurls it at his opponent. Utterly dazed, Turnus has all but lost consciousness, as if he was the one who was struck by the stone he has just hurled: "He does not know if it is he / himself [*neque se . . . cognoscit*] who runs or goes or lifts or throws / that massive rock."<sup>58</sup> As for the stone, "it itself whirls through / the empty void [*vacuum per inane volutus*] but"—redoubling its ineffectuality, like the twice-emptied air through which it flies, and like the arrow in Zeno's paradox (or the projectile from a parallel Lucretian scenario)<sup>59</sup>—"does not cross all of the space [*spatium*] between" (12.896–907). Turnus feels and acts as if he were in a dream, as when we are no longer in control of our limbs or tongue, overcome by weakness and immobility. I say "we," because Vergil, strikingly (and in a breach of his usual practice), shifts into the first-person plural in his dream simile (*videmur . . . succidimus*) before lapsing into the objectifying third person to describe limbs and tongue that are removed from the command center of the self (*non lingua valet, non corpore notae / sufficiunt vires*, etc.). The effect is jarring for the reader, who is at once brought into the picture, and so seemingly made aware of her own reality, and then, or simultaneously, de-realized again, in a way similar to the process described just above.<sup>60</sup> Aeneas, for his part, steps into an irreality of his own. That is to say, he becomes unreal to himself, for as he rains down his final crushing blow upon Turnus, in the culminating gesture of the poem, he disclaims all responsibility for the act: "It is Pallas who strikes you" (12.948–50). No longer himself, Aeneas is somebody else, and precisely when he ought most of all to have come into his own. Or, perhaps, he has finally become what he is, has incorporated the truth of his position in the truth of his desire, which is that of an Other. Aeneas is *inanis*. He has, in Lacanian terms, finally become an incorporation of the Real.

The ending of the *Aeneid* is ghastly in its ghostliness.<sup>61</sup> Aeneas, as a pathological subject, is as dispensable here as he always was, a point that Venus cruelly concedes in Book 10, thus reversing her role of Aeneas's savior from *Iliad* 5:

“Let me send away  
 Ascanius, unharmed, from battle: let  
 My grandson live. Aeneas may be cast,  
 Just as you will, on unknown waves and follow  
 Whatever pathway fortune finds for him;  
 But let me shield Ascanius and take him  
 Far from this dreadful war.” (10.47–51)

And yet, as an empty subject, Aeneas is nonetheless indispensable to the symbolic functioning (ideology) of Rome. As part of its *Trieb-schicksal*, he represents the ethics of Roman drive, its fate and fatality—he is its future in the past, retrojected from the present. And that future is nothing less than the future of an illusion—one that is deeply ingrained in the literary and philosophical memory that Vergil inherited and then passed on to us.<sup>62</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Porter 2003. A note on the translations in this paper: for Homer, I use Lattimore 1951 and 1967; for Lucretius, Bailey; for the *Aeneid*, Mandelbaum.

<sup>2</sup> On Agamemnon, see Porter 1990; on Helen in Gorgias, see Porter 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Which is not quite the same thing as saying that Lucretius, for example, draws heavily on earlier literary tradition, a point that is commonly enough made.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Servius, *Ad Aen.* 2.536, 6.272, etc.; Servius, *Ad Ecl.* 6.13; further, [Vergil], *Catalepton* 5 and 8; Donatus, *Vita Verg.* 79 Diehl. See Conington-Nettleship; Merrill; Mellinghoff-Bourgerie. For the *Georgics*, see most recently Gale.

<sup>5</sup> Hardie; Mellinghoff-Bourgerie, e.g., 102: “Vergil semble souligner à plaisir l’inanité des maux endurés par le héros.” See Servius, *Ad Aen.* 6.893: *vult* [sc. *Vergilius*] *intellegi falsa esse omnia quae dixit*, essentially voiding the contents of Book 6 (cited by Mellinghoff-Bourgerie 214). Mellinghoff-Bourgerie is something of an apologist for this line of interpretation, though she shrinks back from its most radical implications.

<sup>6</sup> Hardie 199.

<sup>7</sup> Hardie 200: “For all its cosmic spaciousness the *Aeneid* can also induce a feeling of claustrophobia.”

<sup>8</sup> Mellinghoff-Bourgerie 207, a view that is reinforced by the selectiveness of the approach (her treatment ends with the end of Book 6, on which, see below), and 229.

<sup>9</sup> Hardie 194–209; Mellinghoff-Bourgerie 229–30, claiming the Epicurean ideal for that “de l’auteur lui-même.”

<sup>10</sup> Lucretius 1.79, cited by Hardie 196 and compared by him to Vergil, *Aen.* 6.781–82: *illa incluta Roma / imperium terris, animos aequabit Olympo*.

<sup>11</sup> See Saint-Denis (editor of the 1935 Budé ad loc. (1.493–97), referencing Lucretius 2.1150–74; Gale 19; and esp. Farrell 167–68. Oddly, none of these comments on the distinctly Lucretian trace, *inanis*.

<sup>12</sup> See Vernant on the concept of the *kalos thanatos*.

<sup>13</sup> See the introduction to this volume, 8–11.

<sup>14</sup> See Parry, and the introduction to this volume, 12–13.

<sup>15</sup> See Freud 1975: 3: 24. See too the last stanza of Cavafy’s poem “Trojans”: “Yet we’re sure to fail. Up there, / high on the walls, the dirge has already begun. / They’re mourning the memory, the aurora of our days. / Priam and Hecuba mourn for us bitterly” (Cavafy 22).

<sup>16</sup> Much like Alexander the Great, reprimanded by Philip in Lucian’s *Dialogues of the Dead* 12.6: “Aren’t you ashamed, Alexander? Won’t you learn to forget your pride, and know yourself, and realize that you’re now dead?” (trans. M. D. Macleod, Loeb Classical Library). The joke in Lucian is that all the characters are not dead but are only imaginary figures (cultural signs, ideologemes as it were) who act as if they were real and refuse to realize that they never really were (real) to begin with. On the logic of the formula, which is that of fetishistic disavowal, see the essay “*Je sais bien, mais quand-même . . .*” in Mannoni, and, e.g., Freud 1933: 101: “It is quite possible, and highly probable indeed, that the dreamer *does* know what his dream means; *only he does not know that he knows it and for that reason thinks he does not know it.*”

<sup>17</sup> For interesting byplays on the two deaths in the *Odyssey*, see now Pucci.

<sup>18</sup> The verb form of this formula, which appears five times in the two epics in this form and once in a related form (*Il.* 11.761), is morphologically ambiguous between third and first persons. See Kirk 290 ad loc., and his paraphrase of the verse: “‘If that relationship ever existed,’ i.e., if ever I lived in Lakedaimon and was married to Menelaos—it all seems so far off now.” Kirk adds: “There is a bare possibility that εἶν refers to Helen herself.” But the upshot is identical in either case.

<sup>19</sup> Porter 1993, esp. 278–80.

<sup>20</sup> Αὐτὰρ ὁ εἶδ' ὄλον τεῦξ ἄργυρότοξος ἀπόλλων / αὐτῷ τ' Αἰνεΐα ἵκελον καὶ τεύχεσι τοῖον, / ἀμφὶ δ' ἄρ' εἰδόλω Τρωῆες καὶ δῖοι Ἀχαιοὶ / δῆλον ἀλλήλων ἀμφὶ στήθεσσι βοεΐας / ἀσπίδας εὐκύνλους λαισῆϊά τε πετρόεντα.

<sup>21</sup> The “you” addressed in his so-called Palinode (“you never were”) is a literary phantom. See Porter 1993: 278.

<sup>22</sup> Book 6 of *De rerum natura* will detail the illusions of what the puddle in Book 4 purports to reflect as a reality; see Porter 2003. Of course, Epicurus (in contrast to Democritus) claims that appearances are real—every bit as real as the underlying atomic structures that cause them. But they remain appearances, distinct from their causes, and they also frequently stand in an illusory relation to those causes. Is it not our everyday belief that external objects are “solid”? And is it not the aim of atomism to prove to us the falsity of this intuition, to make plain to us our frequent “madness” (as with Orestes’ hallucination of the Furies)? Is it not also the aim of atomism to unsettle the apparent naturalness of our sense impressions? Hence the “ruthless determination [on the part of Lucretius] to make his readers face the facts of nature as they really are” (Long 135)—a bitter pill indeed.

<sup>23</sup> The *maiestas* of nature in Lucretius (*maiestas rerum*; see the prologue to Book 5) is the sheer exhilaration that a glimpse of scientific truth affords, but it is a complex kind of exhilaration: nature is first reduced to a *res*, and then that Thing is magnified into a *maiestas*; it is thus a sublime *presque rien*.

<sup>24</sup> “Real war is what Lucretius had in mind” (13); see also 13 n. 9, reporting West’s suggestion that “‘mimic war’ may be a mistranslation anyway, since *simulacra* are not normally ‘imitations’ in Lucretian usage.” What Vergil had in mind in his seeming quotations of Lucretius at *Aen.* 5.585 and 5.674 is another question altogether.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *simulacra divum* in this sense at 5.75.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *horribile* in 3.976, quoted above. Another way to put this is to ask whether *belli simulacra* is “translated” by Vergil into the frieze images of warfare in Book 2 or in the mimed battle maneuvers of Book 5. Interestingly, the latter turn real; and to prove their mimic status, Ascanius hurls down his “empty [*inanem*] helmet” before the Dardanian (Trojan) women who have mistaken his maneuvers for the real thing.

<sup>27</sup> In technical terms, these last are “accidents” (*symptomata*). In Lucretius’s Latin, they are *eventa*; they lack the status of existence that bodies and places have (“so that you may see clearly that all events from first to last do not exist,” 2.478–79), and are less substantial and existent than even void itself (*nec ratione cluere eadem qua constet inane*, 2.480).

<sup>28</sup> I am not denying that Epicureanism attributes reality or truth to appearances. See above, note 22, and Long 135: “*Natura* is objective reality, but . . . it is not real in the way that atoms, void and atomic compounds are real.” By *natura* Long means “scientific reality,” “reality as the object of rational understanding.” I am not sure if this is right, but the distinction is intriguing. *Rerum natura*, if it is meaningful at all, has to include the reality of atoms and void, while science gives us the *de*. A parallel claim can, however, be made for the experience of reality.

<sup>29</sup> And this moreover in Lucretian language: *avulsaque saxa*.

<sup>30</sup> See Hardie 213 n. 143.

<sup>31</sup> His bare name occurs in a catalogue/genealogy at *Il.* 2.822.

<sup>32</sup> Plutarch brings out this association of *simulacra* and Aeneas’s *eidōlon* in his attack on Epicureanism in the treatise *That Epicurus Actually Makes a Pleasant Life Impossible* (*Mor.* 1105f.). As John Henderson points out to me in personal correspondence, the program of the *Eclogues* is similarly announced in the mode of an annulling and devastating privation: *carmina nulla canam* (“I shall sing no songs,” *Ecl.* 1.77), and is followed up immediately by the *studium inane* of Corydon’s song in the second *Eclogue* (2.5).

<sup>33</sup> “Compared with Achilles, Aeneas is but the shadow of a man”: Denys Page, cited in *CHCL* 2: 346–48.

<sup>34</sup> Pound 44.

<sup>35</sup> Significantly, this interpretation reflects Aeneas’s *own* reading of the situation. Contrast Juno at 10.65–66, the truth of whose statement is belied in the end by its own rhetorical perversion: “Did any god or man compel Aeneas / to take the way of war, to let himself / be used [*subegit . . . se inferre*] as enemy of King Latinus?”

<sup>36</sup> Lacan, “Kant avec Sade,” in Lacan 1971: 2:119–48.

<sup>37</sup> See Žižek 1999: 247–49.

<sup>38</sup> On the Kantian subject of the Law and its complications, see Žižek 1998. For the notion of “interpassive,” see Žižek 1999.

<sup>39</sup> I use the term *Kantian* here advisedly, mainly because of the tension that seems to exist in Lacan’s references to Kant in the occasional mismatch between Kant’s transcendental ego and the selfless object of the categorical imperative, the duty-bound subject of Kant’s ethics. See further Žižek 1997: 222–23; and now Zupančič 2000 (for a more positive reading of Kant’s categorical self).

<sup>40</sup> See Zupančič 2000: 31–32 for an acute analysis of this kind of choice.

<sup>41</sup> E.g., “The Subversion of the subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” in Lacan 1977; cf. Žižek 1999: 303. Žižek’s own exemplary critique of postmodern models of self-fashioning clashes with the Lacanian model of ethical self-determination.

<sup>42</sup> Griffith 319 (though see 318), an article that has not received due notice.

<sup>43</sup> The Lucretian echoes are threefold: (1) *inanis* is rigidly formulaic in Lucretius, half of the time appearing in final position, as here; (2) *pascere* is a Lucretian touch, used of sight at 2.419 (*oculus qui pascere possunt*); and (3) Lucretius’s own treatment of the Trojan War comes close to negating it in the course of qualifying its existence: it is technically an “accident” (*eventum*) of places that still are, hence it is not a *per se* existent (2.465), hovering uncertainly between the polarities of body (*a per se*

existent) and void (per se the opposite of what is) (2.479–81). But my point about Vergil's devastating gesture stands irrespective of the possible connection to Lucretius's argument and my (perhaps unorthodox) reading of it.

<sup>44</sup> Mark Buchan suggested this last possibility with the following provocation (per litt.): "What if this picture is already of *Iliad* 5, and thus of a missing Aeneas? Aeneas would then be obsessed with his out-of-place status, his absence from even the earlier epic itself. This could be his answer to the nostalgia for a heroic death in book 1: he was never even a part of that. So he cries."

<sup>45</sup> See Jaś Elsner's article in this volume.

<sup>46</sup> Agamemnon in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, for example, at the moment of death arguably has no perceptual insight of any kind, while his presentation at that very moment is calculated to demonstrate why this lack of insight is precisely required of him and "true to character," while Agamemnon in the *Iliad*, by contrast, has blunted, almost idiotic perceptions (an inability to decipher divine signs, raging and blustering to the point of wordlessness) that are equally true to his character there. See Porter 1990: 44 on Aeschylus.

<sup>47</sup> See Žižek 1989: 35, where the joke is used to illustrate "the objective status of belief." Are not the truths of literary interpretation—which is (as every one knows) highly arbitrary and subjective, vulnerable to change with each new school of reading, and never verifiable in themselves—grounded on this very presupposition, namely, that of the objective nature of subjective belief? The interpreter's truths are not ever objective but are rather "subjectively objective," founded ultimately not in the interpreter's particular subjectivity but in the objectivity of the Other, which is the only guarantee of truth in reading there can be but is also the source of interminable doubt: what does the Other objectively believe? This is not to be confused with the opposite category of the "objectively subjective," which applies to another range of phenomena ("the way things actually, objectively seem to you even if they don't seem that way to you"; see Žižek 2000: 83): the unconscious quality of fantasy in psychoanalytic terms, or the primary qualities of atoms, such as density, tangibility, and weight, in Epicurean terms, or (say) the inverted truth of Aeneas's perception of his empty simulacrum on the frieze (namely, that he is in the end correctly identified by it, being no more than a simulacrum). The ambiguity of *me* (corresponding to either the subject of the enunciation or its object, which is the subject of the statement) embodies this double movement syntactically.

<sup>48</sup> The Lucretian color to this register of the *Aeneid*'s vocabulary, the language of *simulacra*, has been noted before, most recently by Bowie 61–62, 67, who concentrates, however, and despite his appeal to Lacan (58–59), on the body as image ("sign"), as mirroring the subject, and not as Real, that is to say, as both radically Other and as radically (and unreachably) interior to the subject.

<sup>49</sup> But perhaps Aeneas is merely exemplifying a general condition of other Vergilian heroes, all of whom, according to Lukács 40, live out a *Schattendasein* (shadowy existence).

<sup>50</sup> Williams ad loc.

<sup>51</sup> Long after writing this, I came across the following "nonsensical" joke told by Freud (1905: 8: 57) and its commentary in Lacan 1978: 273: "'Never to be born would be the best thing for mortal men.' 'But,' adds the philosophical comment in

*Fliegende Blätter* [a comic weekly], ‘this happens to scarcely one person in a hundred thousand.’” “Pourquoi est-ce de l’esprit? . . . *Mieux vaudrait ne pas être né*. Bien sûr! . . . [Mais] ce qui est ridicule est de le dire, et d’entrer dans l’ordre du calcul des probabilités.”

<sup>52</sup> The tradition of punning on Aeneas’s name is old. Cf. *Hymn. Hom. Ven.* 5.198–201, where the wordplay is metalinguistic, because it gives an etiology of his name (Aeneas [*Aineias*]/awful [*ainos*] grief, with subsidiary echoes): τῷ δὲ καὶ Αἰνεΐας ὄνομα ἔσσεται οὐνεκά μ’ αἰνὸν / ἔσχεν ἄχος ἔνεκα βροτοῦ ἀνέρος ἔμπεσον εὐνή / ἀγγίθειο δὲ μάλιστα καταθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων / αἰεὶ ἀφ’ ὑμετέρης γενεῆς εἰδός τε φρονί τε (“His name shall be *Aeneas*, because I felt *awful* grief in that I laid me in the bed of a mortal man: yet are those of your race always the most like to gods of all mortal men in beauty and in stature” [trans. Evelyn-White]).

<sup>53</sup> “You have the power to pluck Aeneas from / the hands of the Achaeans, giving them / the mist and empty winds instead of him [*et ventos obtendere inanis*] / to change Troy’s ships into as many nymphs.” She adds in the next verse: “Aeneas is away and does not know’ [*Aeneas ignarus abest*] / —indeed, let him be away and not know!” This recalls again the thematic link between Aeneas’s absence and his emptiness—and his subject ignorance or innocence.

<sup>54</sup> *In faciem Aeneae (uisu mirabile monstrum) / Dardaniis ornat telis, clipeumque iubasque diuini adsimulat capitis, dat inania uerba, / dat sine mente sonum gressusque effingit euntis . . .*

<sup>55</sup> *Tum uero Aenean auersum ut cedere Turnus / credidit atque animo spem turbidus hausit inanem: / ‘quo fugis, Aenea? . . .’*

<sup>56</sup> *Et arma viri thalamo quae fixa reliquit / . . . super exuuias ensemque relictum / effigiemque toro locat haud ignara futuri* (4.495–508).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. 6.490: *ut videre virum fulgentiaque arma per umbras*. The cipher “arms and the man” (in fact, a kind of *griphos* or riddle) gains reality as the poem moves on: the most famous line of the poem, its opening phrase, offers an idealized imaginary reflection, which then becomes progressively freighted, fragmented, and real, with irreality being merely the culmination of this Real. A gruesome variation on the theme is at 11.635: “But in the third encounter all the troops / are tangled up with each another, man to man [*virum vir*]; / and then indeed the groans of dying ones, / of wounded horses, butchered men [*semianimes*] rise up; the bodies, weapons mingle in deep blood [*armaque corporaque et permixti caede uirorum*]; / the fight is brutal.” Here, the words “arms and man” signify their own confusion, which is now that of life and death itself: Vergil brings us to the epic territory of the living dead. It may be accidental that *permixta caeda* is Lucretian. At Lucretius 5.1313, however, this phrase is used in the most horrifying and vain battle scene in his poem, a vanity that is all the more poignant given that at the end of his account he throws the reality of this entire story into doubt: “If indeed they ever acted thus [*si fuit ut facerent*]. But scarce can I be brought to believe that . . .” (5.1341–43). Commentators scratch their heads in disbelief here; some wonder if Lucretius was not in fact mad when he set down these last verses (see Bailey ad loc.). But this desperation is unwarranted: Lucretius has abundantly shown how he regards vain contests and struggles as bordering on the unreal. And his gesture is in fact in the tradition of epic poetry at its purest (as with Helen, above)—as are the parallels in Vergil.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Lucretius 3.172–74 on the sequelae of a near-fatal shock of war injury, the “faintness [that] follows, and a pleasant swooning to the ground, and a turmoil of mind . . .”

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Lucretius 1.968–83 (in a discussion of the infinity of space in the universe): “Moreover, suppose now that all space were created finite, if one were to run on to the end, to its farthest coasts, and throw a flying dart, would you have it that that dart, hurled with might and main, goes on whither it is sped and flies afar, or do you think that something checks and bars its way? . . . For whether there is something to check it and bring it about that it arrives not whither it was sped, nor plants itself in the goal, or whether it fares forward, it set not forth from the end. In this way I will press on, and wherever you shall set the farthest coasts, I shall ask what then becomes of the dart. It will come to pass that nowhere can a bound be set, and room for flight ever prolongs the chance of flight.”

<sup>60</sup> Thanks to Eric Downing for pointing out this similarity to me.

<sup>61</sup> See Žižek 2000b: 669: “‘It is not I, the subject, who is speaking, it is the big Other, the symbolic order itself, that speaks through me, so that I am spoken by it,’ and other similar babble.” Cf. Zupančič 2000: 40–41. Aeneas fails to make the final move and to acknowledge that he is the effect of a lack of cause in the Other.

<sup>62</sup> Thanks go to Mark Buchan, Eric Downing, John Henderson, Sara Rappe, and members of the Department of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Bristol for helpful comments on earlier versions of this essay.

Vergil (Japanese: ヴァイリウ, Hepburn: Bājiru) is a fictional character from the Devil May Cry series that was created and published by Capcom. He was introduced in the first Devil May Cry game as a boss called Nelo Angelo (Nero Anjero, which is Italian for "Black Angel"). Vergil is one of two hybrid sons of a demon knight called Sparda and as a result possesses supernatural powers. He has appeared in three video games as one of the main antagonists opposing his twin brother, Dante, and in a novel 2 Vergil, as an inheritor of the literary tradition, also inherits these three senses of void. And so, while it is tempting, when dwelling on the appearance of voids in Vergil, to read him from the start against his Roman Epicurean context, my topic will be straining somewhat against this narrow contextualization of Vergil's poetry. The hunt for specifically Lucretian echoes in Vergil, while valuable in itself, can do an injustice to the wealth of associations and allusions in Vergilian poetry. Might controls everything - and without strength, you cannot protect anything; let alone yourself. Vergil to his brother , Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening. Vergil is the son of the demon Sparda and the human Eva , the elder twin brother of Dante , and the father of Nero . He is one of the main characters in the Devil May Cry series, introduced in the first game as the secondary antagonist, one of the main antagonists of Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening and the final antagonist in Devil May