

Echoing Voices: Portrayals of the Sibyl in Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

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Much of the information which is known today about the Roman Republic and Empire derives from the literature which is extant from that time. Such texts allow modern readers to better understand the social and political background of Rome, and even give clues as to the names of other texts which once existed but have been lost. Roman literature thus plays an important role in understanding Roman history, but it is important to note that such texts are often the interpretations of the authors who wrote them. Historical facts and figures, though real and important, are often seen only through the filter of authors who might decide to emphasize or ignore certain facts. One notable figure in the corpus of Roman literature who is subject to such interpretation is that of the Cumaean Sibyl. Basic facts are known about the Sibyl: originally a Greek tradition, the Sibyl was an old woman known for acts of prophecy under the influence of a god (Piper). Yet the Sibyl did not gain popularity based on such scant details. Rather, the Sibyl is known because of the legends which surround her. These legends were created by Roman authors, most notably the poet Virgil. In his epic poem the *Aeneid*, Virgil portrays the Sibyl as Aeneas' guide during the hero's journey to the underworld. From this episode, the bare facts about the Sibyl can be supplemented with new ones which became popular through Virgil's text, such as her particular association with the god Apollo. While Virgil's Sibyl is arguably the most popular version of the character, Virgil was not the only author who wrote about her. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* includes a similar tale about Aeneas' journey to the underworld which also features the Sibyl. From Ovid, we learn different facts, such as the origin of the Sibyl's longevity and the personal emotions she feels regarding this change. These two versions of the character both complement and complicate the basic facts surrounding the Sibyl. Though each story gives new information, that information often differs and it becomes difficult to call one version of the

Sibyl the definitive version. This discrepancy is a result of the author's interpretation. The way the Sibyl is portrayed in the *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses* differs greatly. For Virgil, the Sibyl becomes a symbol of the change which Augustus was implementing in Rome at the time of the *Aeneid's* creation; in Ovid's hands, the same character becomes a representation of the author's desire to entertain and relate to his audience. Each author uses the basic facts in order to create a facsimile of the Sibyl which suits his own literary needs. Because of this manipulation, the Sibyl does not have a true character of her own, but is a tool which the authors have used to prove their own points. Though certain facts do not change, the Sibyl's personality differs depending on the what the author who is writing about her wants to say. As a result, the character of the Sibyl is not determined by a consistent history, but by the author of the work in which she appears.

The Roman poet Virgil was born in 70 BC near Mantua in Italy. The poet's year of birth falls into the last decade of the Roman Republic. This is an important factor in shaping both Virgil's life and his subsequent works. Virgil was only twenty when Caesar crossed the Rubicon; the poet spent many of his formative years under the devastating influence of the subsequent civil war. This left him very critical and wary of such wars, the impact of which can be seen in many of his poems (Williams). This is no less true for Virgil's best known work, the *Aeneid*, which he began to write in 31 BC, when he was thirty-eight years old. The *Aeneid*, the story of the hero Aeneas' mythical founding of Rome, concludes with a vision of stability absent from the years of social turmoil in which Virgil grew up. In it, Rome is portrayed as a steady, praiseworthy society, free from the fractures which had marred it for most of the poet's life. The date on which Virgil began this epic poem is not a coincidence. On the heels of the destructive civil wars of the past few decades came the ascension of Augustus to emperor and the promise of peace. This new regime created the promise of a "reborn Rome" (Williams), an idea which

Virgil, having grown up as a simple country man, found very appealing. Part of Augustus' reforms included a return to the basic ways of life, free of the corruption that had lately plagued the state (Fife). Similarly, Virgil felt an attachment for the simplicity of the virtues and religious traditions of the Italian people (Williams). Virgil's predisposition to appreciate the calm which Augustus was attempting to bring to Rome influenced his creation of the *Aeneid*. One particular place in the text where this can be seen is in Book VI, in which Aeneas journeys to the underworld with the help of the Cumaean Sibyl. The setting, characters, and dialogue in this book all point towards the influence of Augustus' social reforms, but in particular, the character of the Sibyl stands out as a hallmark of Virgil's modern times. Virgil's choices in this book, and especially his use of the Cumaean Sibyl, reflect his desire to support the current atmosphere of change in Rome.

Virgil did not mean the *Aeneid* to be a fleeting piece of literature. His connection to and approval of Augustus' reforms was something which he wished to impress on future generations. This is made obvious in his creation of the *Aeneid* as a national epic. An ancient epic is "a long narrative written in hexameters...which concentrates either on the fortunes of a great hero or perhaps a great civilization and the interactions of this hero and his civilization with the gods" (Toohey). Often an epic deals with the moral ideas and taboos of the culture it represents. The hero's lessons represent the culture's ideals, and what he does well is a standard which all men should strive for (Drake). Other themes of the epic include the use of a mythical story to emphasize and glorify the better manners of bygone eras, a strong emphasis on religion, and the theme of patriarchy. As a whole, the *Aeneid* strongly supports the morality of past times, though it also suggests that under the influence of Augustus, those times may not be entirely lost. The themes of patriarchy and religion can be clearly seen in Book VI. The entire episode of Aeneas'

encounter with the Sibyl is a reflection of an existing religious cult in Rome. Aeneas himself reflects the importance of patriarchy, as he has come to the Sibyl specifically to see his father:

unum oro: quando hic inferni ianua regis
 dicitur et tenebrosa palus Acheronte refuso,
 ire ad conspectum cari genitoris et ora
 contingat;... (*Aeneid* 6.106-09)

(I beg one thing: Since it is said that here is the door of the lower kingdom
 and the dark swamp which the Acheron has poured into,
 let me be allowed to go under the view and face of my dear father)

Though Aeneas describes the interior of the underworld and therefore knows that his path is dangerous, he does not waver. His only interest is in seeing his father and paying proper respect to his ancestor. In Rome, where the introduction of an emperor had recently added another dimension to the idea of patriarchy, this theme is an important example of the hero representing a cultural ideal.

As an epic, the *Aeneid* falls into a long line of literature that includes the two most famous Greek epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, both of which also feature the Trojan War. While these two epics by Homer are distinctly Greek, Virgil set out to create an epic which was markedly Roman. He could not do so, however, without borrowing, and at times undermining the original texts. There are several similarities between these texts, particularly between the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey*. Characters and settings which are prominent in the *Odyssey* find their way into Virgil's work. For instance in *Aeneid* V, Polyphemus the Cyclops is seen by Aeneas and his crew and Aeneas must make the decision whether to sail between Scylla or Charybdis, the

same monsters with which Odysseus contended. The characters of Circe from the *Odyssey* and the Sibyl of *Aeneid* VI are both associated with magic and both provide directions for their heroes (Prescott 183). Significantly, both heroes also make journeys to the underworld. This too, is a hallmark of an epic. Heroes frequently make such journeys in which they confront death; this allows them to understand that heroism is a spiritual quality and does not depend solely on physical prowess (Drake). Both heroes, therefore, are meant to be admired for their principles and strength of mind as well as their physical endurance. However, despite sharing this experience, here the two heroes begin to differ as Aeneas actually goes inside the underworld, while Odysseus stays at its entrance. Similarly, although Aeneas comes into contact with the same monsters, he manages to avoid any confrontation with them. While Virgil is placing the *Aeneid* inside a tradition, he tends to "diminish the grandeur of the *Odyssey*" (Prescott 183). Virgil is very interested not only in creating an epic, but in creating a Roman epic which is superior to others of its kind. This is one example of the way in which the poem reflects what Virgil saw as Rome's greatness.

A large part of this perceived greatness centers on the difference between the chaos in which Virgil grew up and the new peace which Augustus was attempting to implement. As the first emperor, one of the main things Augustus is known for are his social reforms. Augustus "bemoaned the inability of his generation to come up to the ancient standards" (The Augustan Reformation) and instituted new laws in an attempt to reverse the process. These reforms were political and moral in nature, and the "basis of each of these reforms was to revive traditional Roman religion in the state" (Fife). Some implemented changes included restoring public monuments and temples, reviving games and festivals, and increasing social-class rigidity (Fife). By using the character of the Sibyl, Book VI of the *Aeneid* reflects this new strictness in religion

and in social matters, particularly regarding women. Religious changes under Augustus included an emphasis on traditional Roman religion. It is significant that the cult of the Sibyl originated in Greece. Augustus did not favor new cults being established and given prominence in Rome, yet he allowed already established rituals to continue (Green 179). Like the interest in Cumae, this attraction to the Sibyl was often seen in the aristocracy, which enjoyed foreign culture as a way to mark its status.

According to Varro, a respected Roman scholar and satirist of the early first century BC, there were a total of ten Sibyls throughout the ancient world (*Oxford Classical Dictionary* s.v. "Sibyl"). Virgil's choice to ground his text in the specific figure of the Cumaean Sibyl is a direct reflection of his times. Cumae was a Greek town popular with the Roman aristocracy because of its connection to Greek culture (*Oxford Classical Dictionary* s.v. "Cumae"), and its proximity to other near-by resort towns, such as Baiae. In addition to the Sibyl's popularity among the social elite, the Cumaean Sibyl and the cult of Apollo were important figures of Augustan ideology (*Oxford Classical Dictionary* s.v. "Cumae"). The Sibyl might not have been allowed such popularity in Augustus' time if it were not for her connection to Apollo, whom Augustus considered his own patron god (Green 179). This is an important consideration when discussing the addition of the Cumaean Sibyl into Virgil's work. In the *Aeneid*, the Sibyl channels her predictions through the god Apollo:

at pius Aeneas arces, quibus altus Apollo
 praesidet, horrendaeque procul secreta Sibyllae,
 antrum immane, petit, magnam cui mentem animumque
 Delius inspirat vates aperitque futura. (*Aeneid* 6.9-12)

(But loyal Aeneas seeks the citadel over which high Apollo presides,
and in the distance, an immense cave, the secret rooms of the dreadful Sibyl,
into whom the Delian seer breathes great mind and spirit and lays bare the future.)

Here there is no doubt that the prophecies of the Sibyl are not man-made, but come directly from Apollo. Although the Sibyl is described as living near to Apollo's domain, she is only a subject in the god's lands. The prophecies for which the seer is renowned only occur by the power of Apollo's breath. In Virgil's version, the Sibyl is merely a conduit, and has no control over the process:

ventum erat ad limen, cum virgo, "poscere fata
tempus" ait: "deus ecce deus!" cui talia fanti
ante fores subito non vultus, non color unus,
non comptae mansere comae, sed pectus anhelum,
et rabie fera corda tument, maiorque videri
nec mortale sonans, adflata est numine quando
iam propiore dei. (*Aeneid* 6.45-51)

(He had come to the threshold when the virgin said: "It is time to demand oracles. The god, behold, the god!" When she said such things before the doors, suddenly neither her face nor her color were the same, her braided hair did not remain nice, but her breast gasped, and a wild heart swelled with madness within her, and she seemed bigger and not sounding mortal, she was inspired by the ever nearer will of the god.)

When Aeneas and his party come to the Sibyl's cave, she is immediately aware of the presence of the god. Though the party has come to consult her, she does not rely on her own skills in order to offer them a response; instead, her frantic and repetitive speech indicates that she is expecting the god's presence. When he is near, the Sibyl becomes inhuman. She loses characteristics such as her color, complexion, and hairstyle, which strip her of her femininity as she becomes merely a vessel of communication. She is not described with human terminology, but as "wild" and seized with "madness." What is left of the Sibyl herself is brought down to an animal nature, while at the same time, she seems to grow taller, and no longer "sounds mortal." The fact that the Sibyl is in a frenzy while she utters her prophecies is characteristic of Virgil's portrayal of the character. While some sources agree with Virgil as to the influence of Apollo, some claim a different god is responsible for the prophecies, and others, such as Phlegon of Tralles, Plutarch, and Pausanias state that the Sibyl spoke of her own inspiration, without the intervention of a god (*Oxford Classical Dictionary* s.v. "Sibyl"). Thus, the particular powers and origins which Virgil attributes to the Sibyl are not universally accepted as facts. Virgil's decision once again serves to emphasize the *Aeneid's* role as a reflection of Augustan Rome. Not only was Cumae an important city for aristocrats, Apollo was Augustus' patron god. Virgil's creation of this particular Sibyl, though there were other options and explanations of her character, is directly dependent on the national sensibilities of Augustus' moral reforms.

The Sibylline books, a compilation of the Sibyl's prophecies, helped to perpetuate this ideal. These books were written in Greek and were left in the care of the priestly college, or the *Collegium Pontificum*, which consisted of fifteen priests whose job was to preside over public religious rites ("Priests and Priesthoods of Nova Roma"). Though these priests had authority over religious practices, they were only allowed to consult the Sibylline books if they were ordered to

do so by the Senate (*Oxford Classical Dictionary* s.v. "Sibylline Books"). This ensured that the power of the Sibyl's prophecies lay directly with the upper-class in Rome. Unlike the Delphic Oracle, which could be sought out by any person, the Sibylline Oracles were only accessible to those who were part of the upper class and could understand the Greek language (Green 179). The result of this discrepancy was a mysticism which attracted the lower classes to the figure of the Sibyl, though they could not access the prophecies themselves (*Cambridge Dictionary of Classical Civilization* s.v. "Sibyl"). The formality, secrets, and place of honor which surrounded the Sibyl and her books sparked the popular imagination (Green 179).

The importance of the Sibylline books can be traced through the history of their time in Rome. The original three books are said to have been bought by Tarquin the Proud, the last Etruscan king of Rome. Aulus Gellius, a Latin author and grammarian born around 125 AD, ("Aulus Gellius") documented the now famous story in his compilation of tales *Attic Nights*:

In antiquis annalibus memoria super libris Sibyllinis haec prodita est: Anus hospita atque incognita ad Tarquinium Superbum regem adiit, novem libros ferens, quos esse dicebat divina oracula; eos velle venundare. Tarquinius pretium percontatus est. Mulier nimum atque inmensum poposcit; rex, quasi anus aetate desiperet, derisit. (*Attic Nights* 19.1-4).

(In ancient chronicles the following account is reported about the Sibylline Books: an old woman, a guest and unknown, came to King Tarquin the Proud, carrying nine books which she said were divine oracles; she wanted to sell them. Tarquin inquired about the price. The woman demanded an immense and

extravagant price: the king laughed at her as if the old woman was insane because of her age.)

The information here has the tone of a legend. Gellius himself notes that what he is writing is merely an account which has been passed down through generations. In this way, Gellius's story is similar to Virgil's; both authors are trying to use their works to justify the content of their own realities in Rome. Unfortunately, this tale is much less triumphant than Virgil's. Here at the beginning of the chronicle, there are nine books which the Sibyl calls divine oracles. Yet in Rome, only three of those books were extant. It is important that Tarquinius Superbus is the king who is said to have bought these books. Tarquin is above all characterized by his by-name "the Proud." That pride is at work in this story, as he laughs derisively at the old woman. Though she is a guest, he does not show her hospitality, and instead mocks her age. Tarquin is also much more concerned with the money that he might have to part with than the precious information in the books. The result of this pride is the reduction of the nine books into three after the Sibyl burns six of them in order to force Tarquin's hand.

The carelessness with which these original books were treated seems to have played a role in the ways the remaining three were revered in Rome. In Gellius's text, Tarquin's regret is immediate and the books become precious objects:

Tarquinius ore iam serio atque attentiore animo fit, eam constantiam confidentiamque non insuper habendam intellegit, libros tris reliquos mercatur nihilo minore pretio quam quod erat petitum pro omnibus...Libri tres, in sacrarium conditi, "Sibyllini" appellati; ad eos quasi ad oraculum quindecimviri aedeunt, cum di immortales publice consulendi sunt. (*Attic Nights* 19.8-11)

(Tarquin's expression now became serious and he became more attentive of mind, he understood that her perseverance and confidence were not to be underestimated and he bought the remaining three books for no less price than what had been asked for all...Deposited in a shrine, the three books were called "Sibylline;" to them the fifteen go for oracles whenever the immortal gods must be consulted publically.)

Once Tarquin has recognized his mistake, he quickly makes sure that the rest of the oracles are kept safe. The description of their placement is very close to the way in which the books were actually kept in Rome. They were housed in the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, put in the care of the priestly college, and consulted at the command of the Senate in times of emergency. The "fifteen" mentioned in the text refer to these men of the priestly college, who were responsible for reading the oracles when commanded. However, their stay in this temple did not last, as the temple burned in 83 BC (*Oxford Classical Dictionary* s.v. "Sibyl"). Rather than allow these books to vanish completely, Augustus sent men of high rank to seek out other Sibylline collections in order to establish a new collection in Rome. These new books were personally authenticated by Augustus before being housed in their new home at the base of the statue of Palatine Apollo in gilded cases (Green 179). The opulent new home of the books suggests that they were very important to both the aristocracy and the populace. The importance of the lost six books cannot be overstated when discussing the treatment of the remaining three. Augustus was careful to avoid the mistake of Tarquin. Even though the original books were lost, and though the new copies were different from the Greek originals, the books were not allowed to disappear. In fact, they survived for almost four more centuries until they were permanently lost sometime between 395 and 408 AD (*Oxford Classical Dictionary* s.v. "Sibyl").

The importance of the Sibyl herself can also be seen in Book VI of the *Aeneid*. As Aeneas comes to the Sibyl's door, she scolds him for being slow to offer prayers:

"cessas in vota precesque,
Tros," ait. "Aenea? cessas? neque enim ante dehiscent
attonitae magna ora domus." (*Aeneid* 6.51-53)

("Do you delay in vows and prayers
Trojan Aeneas," she said. "Do you delay? For not before (you pray) will
the thundering house open its great doors.")

This speech of the Sibyl is the first coherent one she gives in the text. As such, it is probable that the prayers she seeks are prayers to Apollo, who is gaining control over her at this point in the poem. She knows that the god who inspires her needs to be praised before he will offer the prophecies Aeneas seeks. Aeneas understands this and begins his prayers with supplications to Apollo. However, Apollo is not the only one he praises:

tum Phoebos et Triviae solido de marmore templum
instituiam festosque dies de nomine Phoebi.
te quoque magna manent regnis penetralia nostris:
hic ego namque tuas sortis arcanaque fata
dicta meae genti ponam, lectosque sacrabo,
alma, viros. (*Aeneid* 6.69-74)

(Then to Apollo and Trivia, I will build a temple of solid marble
and will initiate festival days in the name of Apollo.)

Great sanctuaries wait in our kingdom for you as well.

For here I will also place your prophecies and secret stories told to my people,
and will consecrate chosen men, Nourishing One.)

The first sentence of Aeneas' speech does refer to Apollo. The rest of these lines, however, are addressing the Sibyl. Though the Sibyl did not ask for praises to herself, Aeneas does not leave her out. He makes sure to include her in his prayers and promises. Not only will Apollo, the god, be given a temple and festival days, but his vessel, the Sibyl, will also have sanctuaries for her prophecies in Aeneas' new city. This reverence reflects the importance of the Sibyl in Virgil's own time. Much of the *Aeneid* is an attempt to explain or justify certain customs or actions in Virgil's modern Rome. Here, Virgil is justifying the importance of the Sibyl. Since Aeneas, the founder of the city, praises the Sibyl, it is only right that the rest of Rome perpetuates his example. Interestingly, although the poem is set in the past and made to look like the inspiration for modern practices, the opposite is true. Had the Sibyl not had prominence in Virgil's Rome, he would not have felt the need to explain the tradition of her presence. In Virgil's time, the Sibyl was important enough to warrant characterization and explanation in the poet's work. This tendency reflects a technique which Virgil uses throughout his poem known as etiology. Virgil's use of the Sibyl is meant to be an explanation of why she remains important in Augustan Rome. Using etiology, Virgil works backwards, giving his readers the origin of a practice which they would already recognize from their own time.

Apart from her religious significance, the Sibyl also represents the portion of Augustus' reforms which deal more closely with social issues. Along with implementing new religious standards, Augustus also created new rules by which people must live their personal lives. These included rules about marriage which made divorce more difficult and made being single at a

certain age punishable (Fife). These rules were particularly harsh towards women. Women were restricted from attendance of public spectacles and encountered much stricter punishments than men if they were convicted of adultery. They faced banishment, loss of dowry or one-third of any other wealth, or even death at the hands of their husbands or fathers (The Augustan Reformation). While Augustus saw this as a way to return to classical values, not everyone approved. Some felt that women had been making positive strides towards advancing in society and that these new rules caused them to lose any ground they might have gained (Augustan Reformation). The Sibyl reflects this struggle. Although she has independent power and influence, she is unbreakably tied to Apollo's influence:

At Phoebi nondum patiens, immanis in antro
 bacchatur vates, magnum si pectore possit
 excussisse deum; tanto magis ille fatigat
 os rabidum, fera corda domans, fingitque premento. (*Aeneid* 6. 77-80)

(But not yet submitting to Phoebus, the wild seer rages in the cave
 to see if she can shake off the great god from her chest;
 but all the more, he wears out her raging mouth,
 taming her wild heart, and molding her through restraint.)

Though Aeneas' deference to the Sibyl reflects his deference to her position, these lines show that as a person, the Sibyl is not described as the model of contrite womanhood. Instead, she fights against her fate, even though it may be supposed that she is used to such interactions with Apollo. She is "wild" and "raging," more like an animal than a person. As such, Apollo takes up the role of master and begins to break her as if she were cattle. He "tames" her, "wearing her out"

as if she were a horse which must be ridden until it is ready to submit. In a later passage, Apollo is said to "shake the bridle of the raging one and turn the goad under her breast" (*ea frena furenti / concutit et stimulos sub pectora vertit Apollo; Aeneid 6.100-01*). Apollo has the reins over his vessel, yet he must continue to prod her in order to make her go in the direction he chooses. This struggle could be seen as the struggle of women in Rome as they have their rights stripped away by the new reforms. However, Virgil is not suggesting that the women should win. In fact, by describing the Sibyl as an unwieldy animal, he seems to be suggesting that women must be led or else go wild.

Although the Sibyl holds a position of great importance, she is not trusted to care for things on her own. Even Aeneas is concerned with the way she handles the prophecies she is given:

"foliis tantum ne carmina manda,
ne turbata volent rapidis ludibria ventis;
ipsa canas oro." (*Aeneid 6.74-76*)

("Only do not hand over your songs to pages,
lest they fly as mockeries mixed up by the fast winds;
I beg that you sing them yourself.")

As Aeneas has just met the Sibyl, it can be said that his words are reflective of an issue in Rome in which the precious prophecies are lost and not based on Aeneas' personal observations. According to these lines, however, they are lost not because of time, but because the Sibyl was careless with them. This suggests that even a woman of power does not know enough to be respectful of such an honor, and that Augustus is therefore right in restricting the rights of

modern women. Aeneas' request is likely a response to the history of the Sibylline books as later related by Gellius. Although Tarquin's pride aggravated the situation, it is the Sibyl herself who causes the loss of six of the original books:

Tum illa foculum coram cum igni apponit, tris libros ex novem deurit et ecquid reliquos sex eodem pretio emere vellet regem interrogavit. Sed enim Tarquinius id multo risit magis dixitque anum iam procul dubio delirare. Mulier ibidem statim tris alios libros exussit atque id ipsum denuo placide rogat, ut tris reliquos eodem illo pretio emit. (*Attic Nights* 19.5-7).

(Then she placed in his presence a brazier lit with fire, burnt three books out of nine and asked whether the king would be willing to buy the remaining six for the same price. But Tarquin laughed about it much more and said that the old woman was now crazy beyond doubt. On the spot, the woman at once burned up three other books and calmly asked the same again, that he buy the remaining three at the same price)

Both Aeneas' request and Augustus' stricter rules for women can be said to be a result of the depiction of women in this legend; the mindset of Romans towards women tended to demonize them even at the distant time when this legend came into being. The Sibyl calls her oracles divine, but she is not careful with them. In fact, she is not even accidentally careless as Aeneas seems to believe, but purposefully destructive. She does not hesitate to burn her books and is "calm" throughout the entire encounter. Another criticism which could be attributed to this woman is that she is fickle. When the old woman comes to Tarquin, she knows that she wants to leave with a certain sum of money no matter what it takes to obtain it. When the woman does not

get her way, she resorts to destruction. She uses the brazier in order to sacrifice the books not to a god, but to the idea of her own selfish desires. Virgil's Sibyl is much less combative than the one that confronts Tarquin. However, it seems as if the memory of this original Sibyl is present in both Aeneas' and Virgil's minds. The Sibyl has a history of being careless with the duty she has been tasked with by the gods. Although Virgil's Sibyl seems to accept her place under Apollo, she is still distrusted by men who worry that she does not understand or care about the significance of her task.

The Sibyl is undoubtedly an essential character for reflecting certain aspects of Augustan Rome, such as religion and social reform. However, her greatest importance in the text stems from her job as a prophetess. The section which Virgil dedicates to the Sibyl's prophetic visions relies on the aforementioned technique of etiology. As Virgil writes about Aeneas' founding of the Roman nation, he already knows what that city will look like. Thus the poem itself is written as a prediction of the future. Williams describes the phenomenon by stating that "the use of prophecies and visions ...could foreshadow the real events of Roman history. The poem, then, operates on a double time scale; it is heroic and yet Augustan" (Williams). Prescott seconds this opinion, by noting that "Virgil is representing Aeneas as promising what Augustus had already established or planned" (Prescott 367). This connection could only be seen as Virgil's attempt to connect the past to the future. By describing Augustus' reign through Aeneas' words, he is giving validation to Augustus because his reforms are founded in tradition. Yet the presence of the Sibyl suggests that the past has an even more important connection to the future. Through the Sibyl, Virgil is not only tracing the roots of his modern times, but offering hope for the future. This can be seen in another speech of the Sibyl, as she describes an instance of circular time:

alius Latio iam partus Achilles,

natus est ipse dea;...
causa mali tanti coniunx iterum hospita Teucris
externique iterum thalami. (*Aeneid* 6.89-90 and 93-94)

(A new Achilles has already been born in Latium, himself born of a goddess...

Once again a foreign wife [will be] the cause of such great evil and a foreign wedding.)

Here the Sibyl is describing the future in terms of past events. Her reference to a foreign wife reflects both a sense of repetition and prophecy for the future (Seider 32). Traditionally, the Trojan War began because Paris, a noble of Troy, stole Helen from Sparta and married her. The resulting attempt to bring her back led to a ten year conflict between Greece and Troy which the Trojans eventually lost (Gill). The Sibyl is predicting that Aeneas' quest will lead him into another such marriage. When he reaches Latium, he will find not only another wife, but also another nemesis, such as Achilles was to the Trojan warriors. However, this time, rather than losing his city, Aeneas will found a new one. This makes the circular prophecy of the Sibyl a positive event which suggests a positive outcome for Virgil's modern Rome. Just as the events leading up to Aeneas' founding of Rome included a difficult and destructive war, Rome experienced a similar series of wars before Augustus' rise to power. Though the Sibyl is informing Aeneas of the difficulties he must still face, Virgil and his audience would be aware of his ultimate success. Making a connection between the Trojan War and Rome's civil war also connects the positive outcome of Aeneas' journey with Augustus' reforms. Though the city might go through some trouble adjusting to the new rules, Virgil is suggesting that Augustus'

Rome is a new Rome, founded out of difficulty and as likely to be successful as the Roman Republic before it.

Virgil's interpretation of the role and character of the Sibyl is one which was built with the main goal of preserving a certain time in Roman history. As such, "[e]verything in the *Aeneid* is subordinate to a grand artistic and moral design--Virgil's poem is an assertion of confidence and faith in Rome" (Griffin 69). The form and content of the *Aeneid* as a whole has allowed Virgil's version of the story to be labeled as a national epic. In Virgil's hands, the story of the Sibyl becomes not just a part of Roman mythology, but an important part of Roman history and culture. As noted above, however, Virgil was not the only author to explore the topic. Less than three decades after Virgil's death, another significant Roman author attempted to place his own influence on the story of the Sibyl. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a poem whose name betrays its theme of change, the story of Aeneas' encounter with the Sibyl is recounted as well. While the two stories share the same setting, however, the end result is very different. Both the purposes of the poems and the examinations of the Sibyl differ greatly between Ovid and Virgil. The driving element which seems to make these poems diverse is the distinct purposes of the authors. Virgil was commissioned to write his poem and carried out his purpose to its full potential. The presence of the Sibyl in the *Aeneid* is based entirely on Virgil's interpretation of Augustan Rome, but "the *Metamorphoses* lacks any such underlying moral or patriotic purpose" (Griffin 69). Ovid's poem was written for the purposes of entertainment, and "has equal claim to be a "universal poem of human experience"" (Griffin 69). In creating his poems, Ovid seems to have no other obligation than to create an amusing and thoughtful piece of literature. This allows Ovid to focus on small details which would not fit into the tone of Virgil's grand epic. This applies most notably to Book XIV of the *Metamorphoses*, in which Ovid recreates Aeneas' encounter

with the Sibyl and the hero's descent into the underworld. Since Ovid was working on a popular piece of literature, rather than a poem which was meant to justify the Roman experience, Ovid's text is much smaller in scale, focusing on the personal, rather than the epic.

In Book VI of the *Aeneid*, the Sibyl's purpose is limited. Her job is to instruct Aeneas on the particulars of his journey and then to be his guide. Once in the underworld, the Sibyl's voice is silenced and the large remainder of the book is a description of Aeneas as he meets his former ancestors and future descendants. Ovid also includes this journey, however his description is brief:

Paruit Aeneas et formidabilis Orci
 vidit opes atavosque suos umbramque senilem
 magnanimi Anchisae; didicit quoque iura locorum,
 quaeque novis essent adeunda pericula bellis. (*Metamorphoses* 14.116-19)

(Aeneas obeyed and saw the riches of formidable Orcus
 and his ancestors and the old ghost of the magnanimous Anchises.
 He also learned the laws of the place, and the dangers
 which he must undergo in new wars)

In Ovid's text, Aeneas' journey is begun and completed in a matter of four lines. In Virgil's text, Aeneas receives detailed information from his ancestors, which includes a premonition of the eventual birth of Augustus (Virgil 137). The only similar information that Ovid sees fit to include is an assurance that Aeneas will have to fight new wars in order to found Rome. However, the main bulk of this journey would not have been lost to Roman readers. Virgil and Ovid were close contemporaries of each other as both lived and were influenced by the moral

reforms of Augustus. This short piece of Ovid's text is a small hint at Virgil's ultimate success in his goal to create a long-lasting piece of literature. Although Ovid skips Aeneas' journey, it is unlikely that an educated reader of Ovid's text would not already be familiar with Virgil's work. Ovid, then, is in part using Virgil's success in order to shape his own narrative. Ovid does not need to include the details of Aeneas' journey to the underworld, because doing so would only repeat an already well-known work. Instead, Ovid focuses on different details, leaving the main plot of this story to Virgil, while he displays his interest in smaller and more relatable minutiae.

Critic Daniel Javitch agrees with the idea that Ovid's narrative is closely connected to Virgil's: "The presence of the *Aeneid*, in the form of verbal echoes, recollections, borrowing, and parodies, can be felt throughout Ovid's poem" (Javitch 1026). Such echoes can undeniably be seen in this piece of text. However, Javitch does not merely believe that Ovid used Virgil's text to relate to an audience, but instead gives Ovid a much more aggressive motive for omitting the majority of Virgil's narrative. He believes that "Ovid not only did not share Virgil's sensibility, but was consciously defying that sensibility" (Javitch 1025-26). He goes on to argue that:

Ovid treats the story of Aeneas' voyage no differently from his many other mythical tales. This already indicates the poet's refusal to grant what was, after all, Rome's principal historical myth any more privilege or importance than his other stories. Ovid's main intent, however, was to challenge Virgil's authority, to defy his already classical precursor by denying Aeneas' voyage the epic size, the status of national myth, the unity, and the teleology Virgil had given it. (Javitch 1026)

Javitch's commentary helps to clarify the fact that Ovid was indeed aware of Virgil's accomplishments and was reacting to them. Ovid diminishes Virgil's epic in the same way that

the *Aeneid* often undermines the *Odyssey*. In doing so, each author is attempting to give his own narrative higher import than any other. Javitch's argument is also plausible because undermining Virgil would have been the equivalent of undermining Augustus' new authority. While Ovid and Virgil were both influenced by Augustus' moral reforms, they had very different experiences. Virgil's work proves his allegiance to Augustan reform. The *Aeneid* is, on the whole, an explanation of why Augustus' new rules were the equivalent of Aeneas' original founding of Rome. Virgil can also be said to have benefited by the reforms. They both appealed to his personal sensibilities as a simple country man (Williams) and gave him work when Augustus commissioned him to write the *Aeneid*. Ovid's experiences with these same new rules were not positive, as Augustus' reign coincided with Ovid's banishment in 8AD (Kenney). Although the exact reason for this punishment is not known, one probable explanation relates to the banishment of Augustus' granddaughter Julia for the crime of immorality around the same time. The suggestion is that Ovid was somehow involved in Julia's adultery (Kenney). Ovid was unhappy with his new living arrangements, and often wrote to Rome to plead his innocence. In one of these writings, Ovid uses the phrase "*carmen et error*," a song and an error, to describe his crime, which suggests that one of the love poems in his *Ars amatoria* collection had been the cause of the offense (Gill). His use of the mild word "*error*" to describe his indiscretion, shows that Ovid did not believe his behavior to be a serious crime, and seems to imply that he had "behaved in some way that was damaging both to Augustus' program of moral reform and to the honor of the imperial family" (Kenney). Considering that the nature of Ovid's offense likely spoke against Augustus' reforms, it is not illogical to imagine that Ovid would reject a form of literature which supported not only Augustus, but praised those same reforms. Though the

Metamorphoses was completed just before Ovid's banishment, if Ovid was banished for violating Augustus' rules, it is likely that Ovid did not respect those rules in the first place.

In the place of Virgil's epic tone and grand adventures, Ovid's text focuses on the personal hardships of both Aeneas and the Sibyl. The evidence of this begins directly after Ovid's concise description of Aeneas' journey. Rather than recreating Virgil's description, Ovid narrates a part of that journey which Virgil ignores by describing Aeneas' return to the surface world:

Inde ferens lassos adverso tramite passus
 cum duce Cumaea mollit sermone laborem.
 dumque iter horrendum per opaca crepuscula carpit,
 "seu dea tu praesens, seu dis gratissima" dixit,
 "numinis instar eris semper mihi, meque fatebor
 muneris esse tui, quae me loca mortis adire,
 quae loca me visae voluisti evadere mortis. (*Metamorphoses* 14.120-26)

(From there, taking weary steps on a rising path,
 he softened his hardship through conversation with his Cumaean leader.
 And while he took the terrible way through the shady twilight, [Aeneas] said
 "Whether you are a goddess in person or only most beloved by the gods,
 you will always be equal to a goddess to me, and I will confess myself
 to be in your debt, you, who have wanted me to visit the place of death, and
 wanted me to escape.)

In comparison to Virgil's tale, this part of the story is very small in scale. It also marks the transition from Virgil's familiar story to Ovid's original interpretation. As such, it is immediately clear that Ovid's focus is on the humanity of his two characters rather than their potential as epic heroes. Here, Aeneas' characterization is stripped away to reveal the man underneath. Ovid does not hesitate to point out that Aeneas is "weary" or that he finds his path "terrible." For Virgil, Aeneas is not only the quintessential epic hero, but an early representation of Augustus; Aeneas may show grief for the loss of his companions, but rarely shows any personal weakness. Yet for Ovid, Aeneas is merely a man who has accomplished good deeds. Those deeds may be heroic, yet he is still entitled to feel weary after a long journey to visit his deceased father. Along with feeling physically tired, Aeneas also shows himself to be grateful for the experiences he is having. By thanking the Sibyl, Aeneas proves that he is not unaware of the fantastic feats which are expected of him. He recognizes that going into the underworld was a dangerous event, and understands that he would not have been able to make the journey safely without help. He expresses his gratitude by offering the Sibyl a high compliment. Rather than thanking the gods, he specifically thanks his guide and compares her to a goddess, not because she has the ability of prophecy, but because she has shown him kindness in allowing him to complete his designated task. These details not only contribute to making Aeneas more human, but also more relatable. Without this element, it might be difficult for Ovid to succeed in his task of entertaining a general audience. While Virgil was interested in creating a poem which speaks to and about Rome as a grand empire, Ovid wrote in order to connect to a wide range of human beings on a personal level.

This distinction persists throughout the remainder of this section of Ovid's poem, and it is this feature which drives Ovid's depiction of the Sibyl. Like the description of Aeneas, the Sibyl

in Ovid's text is stripped of the epic qualities which define her in Virgil's text. It is immediately apparent that the influence of Apollo is lessened in the *Metamorphoses*:

At illa diu vultum tellure moratum
 erexit tandemque deo furibunda recepto
 "magna petis" dixit, "vir factis maxime, cuius
 dextera per ferrum, pietas spectata per ignes." (*Metamorphoses* 14.106-9)

(But she, filled with prophetic inspiration from the received god, at last lifted up her face which had lingered on the ground for a long time, and said: "You seek great things, you man greatest through your deeds, whose right hand has been tested by the sword, whose piety has been tested by fire.")

This first glimpse of the Sibyl is similar to the image in the *Aeneid* because the prophetess is immediately coupled with the god from whom she receives her prophecies. However, the similarities end there. Virgil's parallel text is a much more chaotic introduction: "He had come to the threshold when the virgin said: "It is time to demand oracles. The god, behold, the god!" (*ventum erat ad limen, cum virgo, "poscere fata / tempus" ait: "deus ecce deus!"*; *Aeneid* 6.45-46). In the *Metamorphoses*, the Sibyl knows that the god has come, but her words are sensible and complimentary to her visitor. However, in the *Aeneid*, the Sibyl's reaction is close to panic. She feels Apollo's presence and becomes discomposed and frantic in her speech. For Virgil, the power of the god is the more important element of this scene. The Sibyl is Apollo's tool, important only as long as she can give voice to the power of the god. In contrast, the Sibyl of the *Metamorphoses* retains her sense of composure. She is sympathetic to Aeneas, and more

importantly, Ovid describes her in a way which allows readers to turn that sympathy towards the Sibyl herself. Rather than accosting Aeneas and demanding that he properly address Apollo, the Sibyl is quiet when Aeneas enters. It takes her time to acknowledge him, and when she does, her speech is very controlled. Her delay stems from the fact that her face has been hanging towards the ground, a posture which suggests sadness. The Sibyl is not an explosion of energy, but a woman who must force herself to look up in order to accomplish her job. She seems tired, yet remains loyal to her post. These are characteristics which the Roman novelist Petronius wrote about in his *Satyricon* of the first century AD, and the modern poet T. S. Eliot echoed in the dedication for his poem "The Waste Land." In these texts, both authors tell a story about the Sibyl that concludes with her proclamation that she "wants to die" (Eliot 27). Although the Sibyl has immense powers, both Petronius and Eliot focus on the Sibyl's old age and desire to rest. This characterization as seen in Ovid's text tears the focus from Apollo and settles it firmly on the Sibyl as a person. The emphasis is not on the Sibyl's actions when she is possessed, but on the quiet moments which define the Sibyl as a human being.

As Aeneas and the Sibyl return to the upper world, Ovid ceases entirely in any endeavor to characterize or explain Aeneas' character. The remainder of the story is focused on the Sibyl, further proving Ovid's interest in the Sibyl as a mortal and vulnerable character. Even in Virgil, the Sibyl is aware that her powers come at the price of Apollo's possession. The god tames her as he would a horse, and though the Sibyl fights, she is ultimately powerless to resist his influence. In the *Aeneid*, the examination of the Sibyl's reluctance goes no further. She fights possession, but otherwise does not complain or seem to regret her task. It is here that Ovid once again veers away from Virgil's interpretation in order to describe details which were not relevant to Virgil's

epic, namely the story of the Sibyl's origin. Ovid juxtaposes the Sibyl's human characteristics by beginning with a description of how she received her immortality:

lux aeterna mihi carituraque fine dabatur,
 si mea virginitas Phoebos patuisset amanti.
 dum tamen hanc sperat, dum praecorrumpere donis
 me cupit. "elige," ait, "virgo Cumaea, quid optes:
 optatis potiere tuis". ego pulveris hausti
 ostendens cumulum: quot haberet corpora pulvis,
 tot mihi natales contingere vana rogavi; (*Metamorphoses* 14.132-8)

(Eternal life without end was offered to me,
 if my virginity had extended itself to Phoebus, my lover.
 While yet he hoped for this, while he wished to bribe me with gifts,
 he said, "Choose, Cumaean virgin, what you desire:
 what you desire you will obtain." I, pointing to a pile of gathered dust,
 vainly asked that so many birthdays be granted to me as
 the pile of dust had particles.)

Here the Sibyl offers the invaluable information about the fact that she was not always a woman who might be mistaken for a goddess. Though Apollo addresses her as "Cumaean virgin," suggesting that she already possessed her job as prophetess, the woman with whom Aeneas holds a conversation would not exist without this incident. It is an incident which is in itself indicative of Ovid's corpus of work. Alan Griffin notes that "the most prominent theme in Ovid's poetry until his exile is the theme of love," calling Ovid's main interest "love or the emotions" (Griffin

60). The suggestion of a potential love affair is absent from the *Aeneid*, proving that such a theme is more conducive to Ovid's interest than to Virgil's. It is also notable for its portrayal of the fact that the Sibyl made her own choice in this situation. In Virgil's text, the Sibyl's agency is strictly limited. She must give herself over to Apollo in order to give prophecies (*Aeneid* 6.77-80), and when she is not acting in the capacity of prophetess, her main job seems to be an instruction giver, a task which must follow set rules. In Ovid's text, however, Apollo's position of dominance through his godly status is complicated by his role of supplicating lover. Apollo does not take what he wants from the Sibyl; he remains passive as he "hopes" for his potential lover's consent. At last, the god must resort to "bribes" in an attempt to get his way. This puts the Sibyl in a position of unprecedented power. The immortality which results from this incident is entirely the Sibyl's decision. Long life was not bestowed by Apollo by the god's own choice, but by the choice of his would-be lover. Unfortunately, unbeknownst to the Sibyl in her moment of triumph, her choice has consequences: "I forgot that I should immediately ask for youthful years as well" (*excidit, ut peterem iuvenes quoque protinus annos; Metamorphoses* 14.139). Though she has gained her gift of immortality, the Sibyl must now suffer years as an old and decrepit woman.

From this point, the narrative turns even more introspective, revealing the regret that the Sibyl feels at her unfortunate mistake:

"sed iam felicior aetas
 terga dedit, tremuloque gradu venit aegra senectus,
 quae patienda diu est...
 tempus erit, cum de tanto me corpore parvam
 longa dies faciet, consumptaque membra senecta

ad minimum redigentur onus. nec amata videbor
 nec placuisse deo. Phoebus quoque forsitan ipse
 vel non cognoscet vel dilexisse negabit;
 usque adeo mutata ferar, nullique videnda,
 voce tamen noscar, vocem mihi fata relinquent." (*Metamorphoses* 14.142-44,
 147-53)

("But now my happier days
 have turned their backs and feeble old age comes with trembling step,
 which must be suffered for a long time...
 The time will come, when the long days will make me small
 from such a big body, and when my limbs, consumed by age,
 will be reduced to the smallest weight. I will seem not to have been loved
 nor to satisfy a god. Phoebus himself will also perhaps either not
 know me or he will deny he has loved me.
 Having been changed, I will be brought so far to be seen by nobody,
 I will however, be known by my voice, the Fates will leave my voice behind for
 me.")

Once again, Ovid reveals himself to be interested in relatable details. Here, he seems most concerned with creating a sympathetic situation. In Virgil's work, Aeneas typically holds that same role; he has been forced from his home, lost both his wife and his lover, and seeks his journey into the underworld because he wants to talk to his deceased father (*Aeneid* 6.106-09). In Ovid's version, it is the Sibyl's revelation of her unfortunate mistake which changes the tone of

the story from an epic into a personal tale of regret. The details revealed in this passage are once again indicative of a pattern in Ovid's work, namely that "Ovid actually liked women as a sex-- something that cannot be taken for granted in the case of other Latin poets" (Griffin 59). This is important as women most often had marginal roles in Latin literature. Here the Sibyl's pain is not something to be laughed at, but to be pitied. Instead of being gratified by her immortality, the Sibyl is horrified by the prospect of living until her body has degenerated past recognition. Ironically, the power and long-life which makes Aeneas believe the Sibyl could be a goddess is the very trait which emphasizes the Sibyl's human emotions. The Sibyl sees her immortality as a curse, something which has made her days far less happy than those which preceded her refusal of Apollo. Rather than considering her own power, the Sibyl dwells on her degeneration. The subject of the qualms of old age is one which is instantly relatable to the human condition. The Sibyl's fears of becoming frail and losing her strength is a fate which most of the population must also suffer. Ovid's connection to women is most evident in these lines as most of the Sibyl's concerns center around her body. She shows a feminine sensibility regarding her looks, worrying that soon no one will believe that she was ever tempting enough to entice Apollo. She is upset because age will cause her body to shrink, but she does not seem concerned about losing the capacity of her mind. This is most likely because her mind has been given over to Apollo; thus the Sibyl's preoccupation with her body can be seen as a desire to retain some personal power. When she has shrunk into nothing but a voice, she will have nothing left of her own agency. The prophecies for which the Sibyl is renowned happen only under Apollo's influence; the Fates decision to make sure the Sibyl keeps her voice, and thus her prophetic abilities, allows Apollo to finally gain the power which the Sibyl denied him by refusing his offer.

Although Virgil and Ovid begin their narratives in roughly the same place, the end result of their stories is very different. Ovid's interpretation allows both the Sibyl and Aeneas to become relatable characters in a story meant for a broad audience. In contrast, Virgil's version is decidedly impersonal. In the *Aeneid*, the Sibyl is reduced to a guide and a mouthpiece for Apollo. The individual personality traits which she does possess largely exist in order to serve Virgil's goal of praising Augustus. Under such circumstances, it might seem as if Virgil is the only author who uses the Sibyl in order to meet his own ends. However, despite Ovid's lack of interest in a political interpretation, he too, uses the Sibyl to serve the purposes of his text. Ovid uses the Sibyl's pain as a way to make her more human and thus more relatable to his audience. Though this seems like an innocent objective, in truth, Ovid's goal was not only entertainment, but also personal accomplishment; in order to succeed and hold his position as a well known author, Ovid had to write in a way which would reach and appease a broad audience. Both authors ultimately use the Sibyl as tool in much the same way the god Apollo uses her. The authors harness the reputation of the Sibyl and then force her to speak for them. The result is a character which has little personality of her own. The Sibyl, a figure who has been fascinating and important for generations, exists only through the filter of the authors who wished to use her.

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