

AUTUMN DREAMS: SERVIUS ON *AEN.* 6, 282–284

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The paper examines an ancient superstition evoked in Servius' commentary (*Serv. ad Aen.* 6, 284); Servius mentions that, according to a certain authority on dreams, visions seen in the autumn months are particularly untrustworthy. The first part of the article reviews other references to this popular belief (*Plut. Quaest. conv.* 8, 10, 734d–736b; *Alciphr. Ep.* 2, 2; *Basil. Ep.* 207, 1). The second part attempts to reconstruct the reasoning of the authority that Servius had used (*qui de somniis scripserunt*) and at the same time to distinguish Servius' own view on the matter. It is shown that, although the remark on the unreliability of autumn dreams in itself is of little pertinence to the understanding of Virgil's text, it is part of a larger, fairly elaborate exegetical tradition that sought to establish a connection between *Aen.* 6, 282–284 and 6, 893–898.

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Aeneas' descent into the Underworld in the *Aeneid* 6 begins with the *vestibulum Orci*. The description of this sombre place (*Aen.* 6, 273–294), swarming with allegorical figures and mythical monsters, is centred on the great Elm standing in the middle of the *vestibulum*:

In medio ramos annosaque bracchia pandit
Ulmus opaca, ingens, quam sedem Somnia vulgo
vana tenere ferunt, foliisque sub omnibus haerent (*Aen.* 6, 282–284).

“In the middle an Elm, shadowy and enormous, spreads its branches — the space occupied, as men say, by uncertain Dreams, and they cling under every leaf”.

With these three verses Vergil provides a pause in his catalogue of monsters, neatly dividing them into two groups, but also introduces what is evidently a piece of ancient folklore.¹ Servius' commentary on these lines is mainly concerned with Vergil's choice of words and stylistic effects: the grammarian speculates on the exact reference of the expression *in medio*, notes the juxtaposition of the epithets *opaca* and *ingens*, explains the meaning of the adverb *vulgo*. Special attention is given to the epithet *vana* that qualifies the Dreams nesting on the Elm:

FOLIISQVE SVB OMNIBVS HAERENT. Qui de somniis scripserunt dicunt, quo tempore folia de arboribus cadunt, vana esse somnia: quod per transitum tetigit. Vana autem ideo, quia ab inferis; nam vera mittunt superi. Homerus: καὶ γάρ τ' ὄναρ ἐκ Διός ἐστίν (*Serv. ad Aen.* 6, 284).

¹ Cf. Vergil's use of *ferunt* (v. 284) which has long been recognized as his standard means of referring to some antiquarian tradition (cf. Austin 1977, 121: “it is a traditional legend <...>, or at least Virgil wishes it to appear as such”). On traces of folklore in Vergil's description of the Elm, see also Norden 1903, 211; Tabárez 2010, 33–36.

“Those who wrote on dreams say that dreams are uncertain in the season when leaves fall from the trees; Vergil alluded to this belief in passing. But dreams are uncertain because they are sent by the gods of the Underworld; for real dreams are sent from above. Homer: ‘For the dream, too, comes from Zeus’”

Servius shuns the most evident solution, namely, that *vana* is a generic epithet highlighting the fickleness of dreams.² Instead, the grammarian unexpectedly indicates a possible allusion to the belief that dreams seen in late autumn are unreliable, and then goes on to suggest that dreams sent from Hades are unreliable, while those that come from above are prophetic. A gnomic parenthesis from Achilles’ speech, καὶ γὰρ τ’ ὄναρ ἐκ Διός ἐστίν (*Il.* 1, 63) is added in corroboration of this idea: the quotation must have been taken from a second-hand source and does not evoke the original context of the utterance. This scholium is common to the Servius’ original commentary and to the so-called *Servius auctus*;³ the latter adds, however, an alternative explanation for Vergil’s placing of *vana somnia* on the Elm, visibly linking unreliable dreams with drinking (unfortunately, the end of the remark is lost):

Et quidam tradunt ideo in ulmo somnia inducta, quod vino gravati vana somnient et ulmus apta sit viti; et ideo apud inferos rem inanem.† (Serv. Dan. *ad Aen.* 6, 283).

“And some also say that dreams nestle in the Elm, because those who are overpowered with wine see uncertain dreams, and because the Elm is well adapted for the grape vines; and because in the underworld uncertain things.”

While the information given by Servius is certainly of interest, the remark on the unreliability of dreams seems largely out of place. Vergil is speaking of a tree in the underworld that cannot be subject to changes of season, while the superstition refers to late autumn months; moreover, Servius mentions the moment when trees lose their foliage, suggesting a parallelism between dreams that disappear without trace and the autumn leaves, while Vergil, on the other hand, had specifically used the verb *haerere* of the flock of dreams holding firmly on to the branches of the Elm.⁴ It comes as no surprise therefore that the grammarian’s remark is not taken seriously by modern commentators

² This possibility is briefly mentioned in form of a question in the *Servius auctus* (a version of Servius’ commentary with numerous supplements first published in the year 1600 by Pierre Daniel): *VANA TENERE utrum καθόλου, an quae ex his vana sunt?* “are dreams uncertain in general, or are those that come from [infernal deities] uncertain?” (Serv. Dan. *ad Aen.* 6, 284). The supplements of the *Servius auctus* are heterogeneous, encompassing material that ranges from Donatus to other scholars of the late Antiquity (Macrobius, Isidore of Seville) to medieval sources. For the current passage, the exact source of the *additamentum* is impossible to determine.

³ The unreliability of autumn dreams was also mentioned in the *Mythographus Vaticanus III* (a mythological compendium compiled by the late XII century scholar Master Alberic of London) in the section on the gates of sleep: *Somnia vana sub foliis refert haerere Vergilius, quia qui de somniis tractarunt, quo tempore folia de arboribus cadunt, vana esse somnia dixerunt* “Vergil recounts that uncertain dreams cling under leaves, because those who wrote on dreams said that dreams are uncertain in the season when the leaves fall from trees” (*Myth. Vat. III*, 24, 6). The resemblance of wording, as well as an earlier evocation of Servius, leaves little doubt that Alberic took the information directly from Servius (cf. Dain 2005, 120 n. 129).

⁴ The impression of the dreams’ active tenacity is conferred by the verbs *tenere* and *haerent*, as has been noted by Tabárez 2010, 30. I thank Prof. Gavrilov for calling my attention to the contradiction between Servius’ remark and Vergil’s use of the verb *haerent*.

of Vergil.⁵ E. Jeunet-Mancy in her commentary on Servius only points out that the connection between leaves and dreams seems unparalleled (contrary to the explanation in the *Servius auctus* of untrustworthiness of autumn dreams through the properties of wine in the fall that finds parallels in other writers⁶), and that Servius' source in this case is difficult to establish.⁷

Although the relevance of Servius' remark for Vergil's text is not immediately obvious, one is reluctant to write it off as a gratuitous piece of information that found its way into the commentary due to a loose association. In compiling his commentary, Servius never lost sight of his main goal, which was to provide the students with a guide to Vergil's text: the majority of his remarks are concerned with language and style, and other types of exegesis are present only when they were deemed strictly necessary;⁸ similarly, the grammarian consistently seeks to eliminate apparent textual problems, not to suggest novel, textually unmotivated interpretations of the text.⁹ It thus seems worthwhile to examine this seeming exception to Servius' usual practice. We will start by tracing other texts that mention the superstition, while the second part of the article will aim at reconstructing the reasoning behind Servius' reference to it in his scholium on *Aen.* 6, 284.

The superstition

Although the belief that late autumn dreams cannot be trusted is regularly overlooked in modern treatments of ancient superstitions,¹⁰ it is attested in several texts from the late antiquity. One of the fictitious *Rustic Letters* of Alciphron in which the farmer Iophon tells his friend Eraston of the dream he had seen the previous night gives us an important insight into the type of contexts in which this belief could be evoked:

Ἐπιτριβείη καὶ κακὸς κακῶς ἀπόλοιτο ὁ κάκιστος ἀλεκτρυῶν καὶ μιαρῶτατος, ὅς με ἠδὺν ὄνειρον θεώμενον ἀναβοήσας ἐξήγειρεν. Ἐδόκουν γάρ, ὦ φίλτατε γειτόνων, λαμπρὸς τις εἶναι καὶ βαθύπλουτος, εἶτα οἰκετῶν ἐφέπεσθαί μοι στίφος, οὗς οἰκονόμους καὶ διοικητὰς ἐνόμιζον ἔχειν. Ἐφῆκεν δὲ καὶ τῷ χεῖρε δακτυλίων πεπληρῶσθαι καὶ πολυταλάντους λίθους περιφέρειν· καὶ ἦσαν οἱ δάκτυλοί μου μαλακοὶ καὶ ἤκιστα τῆς δικέλλης ἐμέμνηντο. Ἐφαίνοντο δὲ καὶ οἱ κόλακες

⁵ Heyne 1832, 893–894 and Norden 1903, 210–212 mention Servius only with regard to the meaning of the adverb *vulgo*. Conington 1863, 284 briefly summarises Servius' idea passing no judgement on its relevance. Austin 1977, 121 only remarks on Servius' association of the *somnia vana* in the *vestibulum Orci* and with the *falsa insomnia* and the ivory gates through which Aeneas leaves the Hades described by Vergil at the end of Aeneas' journey in the Hades (*Aen.* 6, 896–898).

⁶ Cf., in particular, Plat. *Resp.* 9, 571c–572a; Cic. *De div.* 1, 29, 60; Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 10, 211; Macr. *Somn. Scip.* 1, 3, 4, as well as Basil. *Ep.* 210, 2–3 which will be mentioned below.

⁷ Jeunet-Mancy 2012, 228 n. 360: « Servius ne précise pas quels sont les auteurs auxquels il se réfère ici. 'Ceux qui ont écrit sur les songes' sont nombreux, d'Homère à Artémidore d'Éphèse, en passant par Aristote et Cicéron. On trouve bien chez Pline l'Ancien (*Histoire naturelle* XXVIII, 14) une allusion à une propension aux rêves qui serait plus grande au printemps et en automne, mais rien qui corresponde vraiment à ce que dit le grammairien. »

⁸ For a full description of Servius' methods and aims, see Kaster 1997, 169–197 (see esp. 170); cf. also Stocker's distinction between Servius' commentary and the *Servius auctus*: "The vulgate Servius is a Vergil commentary for beginners, a text for the school of the *grammaticus*. The source for the Danieline *addita-menta* is a more advanced commentary on Vergil, for more experienced readers" (Stocker 1963, 14).

⁹ Cf. Fowler 1997, 73–74.

¹⁰ For general treatments of ancient superstitions see, for example, Riess 1893 (cf. Riess 1895), Calderone 1972; neither is the belief in the unreliability of autumn dreams mentioned in general studies on dreams in antiquity, such as Kessels 1978, Hanson 1980 or Harrison 2013.

ἐγγύθεν, Γρυλλίωνα εἴποις ἄν καὶ Πατακίωνα παρεστάναι. Ἐν τούτῳ δὴ καὶ ὁ Ἀθηναίων δῆμος εἰς τὸ θέατρον παρελθόντες ἐβόων προχειρίσασθαι με στρατηγόν. Μεσοῦσης δὲ τῆς χειροτονίας ὁ παμπόνηρος ἀλεκτρυὼν ἀνεβόησε καὶ τὸ φάσμα ἠφανίσθη. Ὅμως ἀνεγρόμενος περιχαρῆς ἦν ἐγώ· ἐνθύμιον δὲ ποιησάμενος τοὺς φυλλοχόους ἐστάναι μῆνας ἔγνω εἶναι τὰ ἐνύπνια ψευδέστατα (Alciphr. *Ep.* 2, 2).

“May he be damned and perish badly that vilest, dirtiest cock that woke me by his cry while I was dreaming a pleasant dream. For I dreamt, my dearest neighbour, that I was someone illustrious and mightily rich, and that an array of servants followed me around who, as I thought, were my stewards and accountants. And I saw that both my hands were covered in rings and bore gems worth many talents: and my fingers were soft and had no memory of the mattock. Flatterers also appeared nearby — you would have said that I was attended by Gryllion and Patacion. And then of course all the people of Athens gathered in the theatre and were shouting that I should be elected general. And in the midst of voting, that rascal of a cock crowed and the vision vanished. Still, on awaking, I was mighty glad; but then, remembering that it was fall, I realized that the dream was absolutely false”.

Iophon's first feeling on awaking is joy, because his dream might turn out to be prophetic, but the thought of the autumn quickly crushes his hopes: thanks to the cock, he can no longer enjoy the dream, and because of the season neither can he hope for it to come true. The reference to the superstition is well suited to the general style of the letter that characterises Iophon as a simple uneducated farmer, such as his use of superlatives and repetitions (κακὸς κακῶς ἀπόλοιτο ὁ κάκιστος ἀλεκτρυὼν καὶ μιαρῶτατος), of exaggerations (such as πολυτάλαντος and παμπόνηρος, or as οἰκετῶν ἐφέπεσθαι μοι στίφος), of plurals where a singular would have largely sufficed (οἰκονόμους... ἐνόμιζον ἔχειν), as well as the anacoluthon ὁ Ἀθηναίων δῆμος... παρελθόντες ἐβόων. Other means of rendering Iophon's character are the naïveté of the details mentioned (the costliest rings worn on every finger, attention from professional flatterers,¹¹ the unanimous vote of the Athenians electing him στρατηγός) and the gradual transition from wealth to admiration as the narrator's fancy takes flight, rendering his dream more and more fantastic.¹² In this context, Alciphron ends his letter on a humorous note, adroitly bringing up the belief in the fallaciousness of autumn dreams and stressing the contrast between Iophon's dream and the waking reality.

Another example that shows how current the superstition was in late antiquity, appears in a Christian context, in one of the letters in which St. Basil defends himself before the clergy of Neocaesarea against criticism concerning his establishment of ascetic communities and the introduction of a new type of psalmody. His opponents (in particular, bishop Atarbios who is not named in this letter, but is clearly hinted at) went so far as to use a revelation seen in a dream to denounce Basil's teaching; Basil discards the vision, reducing it to the rank of “autumn dreams”:

Οἱ γὰρ ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ἡμῶν κατηναισχύντησαν ὥστε καὶ ὄνειρους τινὰς ἐφ' ἡμᾶς συμπλάσαι διαβάλλοντες ἡμῶν τὰς διδασκαλίας ὡς βλαβεράς· οἱ, κἂν πάντα τὰ τῶν φυλλοχόων μηνῶν

¹¹ On Gryllion and Patacion, see Costa 2001, 133.

¹² In depicting his rustic letter-writers, Alciphron greatly relied on comedy (cf. Benner, Fobes 1949, 5–17; Konstantakos 2005, 18). It would be tempting to imagine that Alciphron's use of the superstition to characterize Iophon might go back to a model in the New Comedy, but this is impossible to prove: one probable model for Iophon's letter (with striking resemblance to the opening imprecations against the cock) has been discovered by Reich in Lucian's *Gallus* (cf., in particular, sect. 1 and 12) and used as an argument for the relative dating of the two authors; Lucian, however, does not mention the unreliability of autumn dreams.

φαντάσματα ταῖς ἐαυτῶν κεφαλαῖς ὑποδέξωνται, οὐδεμίαν ἡμῖν βλασφημίαν δυνήσονται προστρίψασθαι, πολλῶν ὄντων ἐφ’ ἐκάστης Ἐκκλησίας μαρτυρούντων τῇ ἀληθείᾳ (Basil. *Ep.* 207, 1).

“They have indeed gone to such lengths of shamelessness as to even invent some dreams, slandering our teaching as harmful. These people, were they to receive within their heads all the visions of autumn months, will not be able to attribute to us any blasphemy, as there are many witnesses to the truth in every church”.

With remarkable casualness Basil refers to dreams seen in the autumn months as part of a hyperbole (πάντα τὰ τῶν φυλλοχόων μηνῶν φαντάσματα), without explaining the allusion in any way.¹³ Comparison with other letters on the same subject (especially *Ep.* 204 and *Ep.* 210) shows that for Basil the expression was largely analogous to a much commoner idea of unreliability of dreams seen after drinking, the kind of behaviour for which he criticized Atarbios and other followers of Sabellianism:

Τί οὖν χρή πρὸς ὄνειρους καταφεύγειν, καὶ ὄνειροσκόπους μισθοῦσθαι, καὶ ἐν ταῖς πανδήμοις ἐστίασεν ἡμᾶς ποιεῖσθαι παροίνιον διήγημα; (Basil. *Ep.* 210, 2).

“Why then do you need to resort to dreams and to hiring dream-tellers, why make us the subject of banter over drink at your public banquets?”¹⁴

The fact that Basil expected his addressees among the Neocaesarean clergy to understand his very brief reference to autumn dreams suggests that the belief was still current among commoners. Basil uses the reference to the ancient superstition to brand his theological opponents as being no different from pagans and to emphasize the difference between his own enlightened version of faith and Atarbios’ unwholesome influence on his simple-minded followers.¹⁵

Both Alciphron’s and Basil’s evocation of the unreliability of dreams in autumn months show that the belief was associated with common, unsophisticated way of thinking, and it is not surprising that the references to the belief are scanty in ancient literature. Fortunately for us, the superstition gained attention from philosophers, and Plutarch even preserves a debate concerning the causes behind the belief in one of his dialogues in the *Quaestiones convivales* (Διὰ τί τοῖς φθινοπωρινοῖς ἐνυπνίους ἤκιστα πιστεύομεν, *Plut. Quaest. conv.* 8, 10, 734d–736b). Plutarch begins the dialogue by setting the circumstances in which the participants came to discuss this topic: young Florus, excited with reading by Aristotle’s *Physical problems* that he has only lately discovered, uses every possibility to discuss the

¹³ The allusion is in fact so fleeting that it seems to have passed unobserved by Deferrari 1986, 182–183 who makes no comment on the expression.

¹⁴ Cf. also ἀλλ’ ὑμεῖς τὰς οἰνοβαρεῖς κεφαλὰς, ἃς ὁ ἐκ τῆς κραιπάλης ἀναφερόμενος ἀτμός, εἶτα ἐγκυμαίνων, καταφαντάζει, χαίρειν ἀφέντες, παρὰ τῶν ἐργηγορότων ἡμῶν καὶ διὰ τὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ φόβον μὴ δυναμένων ἡσυχάζειν τὴν βλάβην ὑμῶν ἀκούσατε, “but may you part ways with those heads heavy with wine that are revealed by the vapor, rising and swelling from their drinking-bouts, and hear from us, who have awakened and cannot keep quiet for the fear of God, of the harm that has been done to you” (Basil. *Ep.* 210, 3). The way in which Basil adroitly combines the idea of unreliability of dreams seen after drinking with the criticism of the *mœurs* of Atarbios’ circle, is well analysed by Pouchet 1992, 482; cf. in particular, « L’impression se mue en certitude lorsque Basile <...> met en connexion songes et ébriété avec les banquets religieux (ἐστιάσεις) de caractère publique (πανδήμοις). Par son esprit de discorde obstinée, Atarbios s’est dérobée à l’Esprit-Saint et voici qu’à son insu, il est à la merci d’un esprit menteur, ‘celui qui opère maintenant dans les fils de la désobéissance’ » (*ibid.*; the last reference is to Basil. *Ep.* 210, 10).

¹⁵ Cf. Pouchet 1992, 481.

problems raised by Aristotle, and among them the alleged unreliability of autumn dreams: although the question is not examined in the surviving text of the treatise, it must have been present in the variant of *Physical problems* known to Florus and Plutarch.¹⁶ In the beginning of the dialogue Plutarch's sons are ready to accept, without probing further, Aristotle's explanation that blamed unreliable autumn visions on the quality of autumn food, in particular, fruit (734 e–f = Aristot. fr. 735 Gigon). An alternative explanation is presented by Favorinus who, despite being a devout peripatetic¹⁷, in this case evokes Democritus' atomistic theory of images, connecting the unreliability of dreams with the harshness of autumn air and the winds that distort the images, slowing their progress, or even leading them off their course (735a = Democr. A 77 DK).¹⁸ The third and final explanation is offered by Autobulus, one of Plutarch's sons, who jokingly accuses Favorinus of citing Democritus only to win favor for Aristotle's view on the subject; his own explanation, despite being characterized as Aristotelian in its origin, differs from the physiological and dietetic explanation that was offered at first. Taking as his starting point the term φυλλοχόος that designates the season when dreams are untrustworthy, and pointing out that the fall of leaves is caused by the predominance of dryness and the cold over the humidity and warmth in late autumn, Autobulus connects the unreliability of dreams with these same qualities that are proper to the autumn air and that affect the humans' health in general and their breath in particular, thereby injuring the soul's capacity for divination.¹⁹

Plutarch does not explicitly favour one of the three explanations, although Aristotle's dietetic theory seems to be presented as reductive, and Democritus' atomistic approach is declared (albeit with irony) weaker than Aristotle's interpretation (735c), so that Autobulus' interpretation (as the last voiced and left uncontradicted) appears to have an advantage over the others. The comparison of two distinct philosophical paradigms (peripatetic and atomistic) is, of course, central for the development of the dialogue. It is, however, easy to forget that behind these heterogeneous philosophical approaches the problem in question is a popular superstition that saw an analogy between the fall of leaves and dreams, brief and unreliable.²⁰ Philosophy only tried to give a reasonable explanation to this belief. Plutarch's dialogue shows that it was certainly current in the classical age, so much so that it even received a philosophical interpretation from Democritus and Aristotle; given the

¹⁶ Cf. Braccini 2014, 301; for a general discussion of the text of the *Physical Problems* known to Plutarch, see Sandbach 1982, 223–225, with literature.

¹⁷ Cf. ὁ δὲ Φαβωρίνος αὐτὸς τὰ μὲν ἄλλα δαιμονιώτατος Ἀριστοτέλους ἔραστής ἐστι καὶ τῷ Περιπάτῳ νέμει μερίδα τοῦ πιθανοῦ πλείστην “In other matters Favorinus himself is an extraordinary admirer of Aristotle and attributes greatest credibility to the peripatetic teaching.” (Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 8, 10, 734f).

¹⁸ More generally on Plutarch's reception of Democritus' theory of *eidola*, see Herschbell 1982, 103–105. Favorinus' speech in the dialogue (*Quaest. conv.* 8, 10, 734f–735c) is one of the main sources on Democritus' theory of dreams: see also Salem 1996, 211–213; Cambiano 1980, esp. 439–441; Brillante 1986, 30–31.

¹⁹ Cf. τοῖς δὲ σώμασι τὰς ψυχὰς συμπαθεῖν ἀνάγκη, καὶ μάλιστα παχνομένου τοῦ πνεύματος ἀμαυροῦσθαι τὸ μαντικόν, ὥσπερ κάτοπτρον ὀμίχλης ἀναμπλάμενον, “and inevitably the souls are influenced as well as the bodies, and with the great condensation of the spirit the capacity for divination is dimmed, as a mirror filled with mist (i.e. breathed upon)” (*Quaest. conv.* 8, 10, 736 a–b). For the analysis of Aristobulus' opinion and of the way it is presented in the dialogue, see Braccini 2014, 55–57.

²⁰ As is often the case with popular beliefs, the exact idea behind this analogy is difficult to grasp. Leaves, however, are regularly evoked as a paradigm of ephemerality (as in the standard comparison between the frailty of man's life or the succession of human generations and the ‘generation of leaves’; cf. Hom. *Il.* 6, 146–149; 21, 464–466; Mimn. fr. 2, 1–4 West; Aristoph. *Av.* 685; Hor. *Ars* 60–62), and as such constitute an obvious counterpart to the fickleness and unreliability of dreams.

stability and longevity of superstitions, one is justified in assuming that before coming to the attention of philosophers, the belief had been current for a considerable while, even though it does not seem to have been evoked in the extant texts from the archaic and classical periods. This should not surprise us, however, as the unreliability of autumn dreams is at once very specific as regards the circumstances (the season in which the vision is seen) and connotated as a belief held by simple, uneducated people that were not often represented in works of literature. It should finally be noted that the belief seems to have been current only in the Greek tradition: the term φυλλοχόος which is central to it does not have a Latin equivalent (so that Servius is obliged to paraphrase it *quo tempore folia cadunt*), and the superstition does not seem to have been invoked in Roman literature. It could, however, be included in Roman treatises on dreams that borrowed freely from Greek oneiromancy; one of these Servius had apparently used.

Servius' argumentation

We can turn now to the reasons behind Servius' evocation of the superstition in his commentary on *Aen.* 6, 282–284. As has been noted above, Servius as a commentator tends to focus on information either necessary for pedagogical reasons (explanation of Vergil's text in a classroom), or one that was authoritative to an extent that it could not be ignored. Although the scholium on v. 284 mentions no names, Servius' wording (in particular, the expression *qui de somniis scripserunt*) makes it clear that his information comes from some kind of treatise on the subject of dreams. The same oblique reference appears once again in *Aeneis* 6, in the scholium on v. 893, providing a helpful clue to the approach of Servius' source to Vergil's text.

At the end of *Aeneis* 6, as Aeneas and Sibyl prepare to leave the Underworld, they are guided by the shade of Anchises to the twin gates of Sleep. Vergil took this image over from Homer (*Od.* 19, 562–567), where it is evoked by Penelope in order to demonstrate how difficult it is to distinguish between prophetic and false dreams. Vergil preserves the respective allegorical meaning of the two gates, but combines it with the idea of the Underworld (a connection that was not present in Homer), and unexpectedly makes Aeneas exit through the ivory gate reserved for false dreams:

Sunt geminae Somni portae, quarum altera fertur
 cornea, qua veris facilis datur exitus umbris,
 altera candenti perfecta nitens elephanto,
 sed falsa ad caelum mittunt insomnia Manes.
 his ibi tum natum Anchises unaque Sibyllam
 prosequitur dictis portaque emittit eburna (Verg. *Aen.* 6, 893–898).

“There exist twin gates of Sleep, one of which, as they say, is of horn and through it an easy outlet is given to the real shades; the other is perfect gleaming with splendid ivory, but the Manes use it to send false visions skywards. It is there then that Anchises, with these words, attended his son and Sibylla and let them out through the ivory gate.”

This passage is one of the most debated in the whole of Vergil's *œuvre*. Multiple explanations have been proposed by modern research none of which is wholly satisfactory:

- (a) the ivory gate is located in the *vestibulum Orci*, and the expression *insomnia falsa* (v. 283–284) that echoes *somnia vana* of v. 896 allows the reader to identify the

two places, suggesting that Aeneas was obliged to take the same gate that he had used to gain entry to the Underworld;²¹

- (b) Aeneas is in fact not a shade at all, and consequently cannot go out of the gate reserved for real dreams;²² in a similar line of thinking, Aeneas no longer has the Golden Bough and thus has to blend in with the false shades in order to leave the Hades;²³
- (c) the choice of gate alludes to the time of Aeneas' departure from the Underworld. According to another ancient superstition, only dreams seen after midnight were trustworthy; Aeneas' exit through the ivory gates would point to his return before midnight;²⁴
- (d) for Vergil, the detail was means of dissociating the prophecies heard in the Underworld and the actual future of the Rome: although Vergil's readers will recognize actual events of Roman history in the prophecies, the poet uses this detail in order to preserve the intrigue and to render the accomplishment of his task less certain from Aeneas' point of view. Thus, his experience is presented as imprecise and somewhat deceptive, suggesting also that Aeneas will no longer remember it on his return to the realm of the living;²⁵ from a similar perspective, Aeneas' exit through the gate of ivory has been viewed as enhancing the dreamlike atmosphere of *Aeneis* 6.²⁶

If modern scholarship is at loss as to how Vergil's meaning should be interpreted, the ancient readers also struggled to agree on a single approach, as Servius' entry on the passage makes it clear. Servius regroups the proffered explanations, starting with the "poetic" interpretation that Vergil sought to present Aeneas' experience as unreal (*et poetice apertus est sensus: vult autem intellegi falsa esse omnia quae dixit*, "and from the

²¹ Highbarger 1940, 71; Steiner 1952, 94–95.

²² Thus, already Heyne 1832, 1043: "Educendus erat Aeneas ex locis inferis per aliam portam, quam qua subierat. Incidit poeta in portas Somni. Iam eae duplices sunt, altera, per quam *veris umbris* datur; per hanc Aeneas et Sibylla, quae non erant *verae umbrae*, emitti nequibant; restabat itaque, ut per alteram portam dimitterentur"; cf. also Paratore 1954, 353 ("egli non deve presentarsi in sogno a nessuno; può uscire quindi dalla porta delle visioni inani"); Reed 1973, 314–315; Cockburn 1992, 363–364.

²³ Thus, Rolland 1957, 186; Kopff, Marinatos Kopff 1976, 249–250.

²⁴ The connection was first proposed by Everett 1900 who emphasized occasional references to the progression of time in the *Aeneis* 6; the interpretation was embraced by Norden 1903, 339–340, but did not gain favor with later scholars: see in particular, Clausen 1964, 147 who refuses to reduce this suggestive detail to a mere indication of time, as well as Steiner 1952, 94; Otis 1959, 174; cf. Harrison 2013, 179–181.

²⁵ Brignoli 1954; Tarrant 1982, 53–55; Gotoff 1985; Molyviati-Topsis 1995, esp. 641–643 and 650; von Möllendorff 2000, esp. 63–65.

²⁶ Thus, Otis 1959, 176–179 (cf. also Steiner 1952, 96). In order to justify Aeneas' leaving through the door reserved for false dreams, in spite of the connection between prophecies that Aeneas hears in the Hades and the future of Rome that would have been evident for Vergil's readers, Otis adds a psychological dimension to this interpretation: cf. "most fundamentally then, the identification of Aeneas' vision as a dream signifies that the primary struggle and action of the poem (or more exactly of the Odyssean *Aeneid*, Books 1–6) is *within* Aeneas' own consciousness, not *outside* it" (Otis 1959, 179); a similar emphasis on the subjectivity of Aeneas' experience in the Hades is found in Setaioli 2010, esp. 33–34. For other, less influential and largely unconvincing interpretations of Aeneas' departure through the Gate of Ivory, see Mellinghoff-Bourgerie 1990, 216–221 and independently Kilpatrick 1995, 64–66 who compare ivory and horn from the point of view of their respective transparency/opacity; Michels 1944, 147–148 and Frantantuono 2007, 635 who argue for a reference to Lucretius and to the Epicurean rejection of afterlife; Maleuvre 1996, 93–95 who sees in Vergil's use of this detail an implicit criticism of his hero. The most radical solution is, of course, to modify the transmitted text: thus, Nauck 1874, 89–99, and recently Kraggerud 2002, 134–135 and 140–142 (see also Cockburn 1992, 363 and 364).

poetic point of view, the meaning is clear: he implies that everything he said was false”). He then passes on to the “physiological” explanation according to which the gate of horn is seen as a reference to visual perception (suggesting that the phenomenon perceived is real), while the gate of ivory refers to the mouth (implying that the phenomenon only talked of, but not seen, may be false). The third interpretation is attributed to certain “authors who wrote on dreams”:

Est et alter sensus: Somnum novimus cum cornu pingi. Et qui de somniis scripserunt dicunt ea quae secundum fortunam et personae possibilitatem videntur habere effectum. Et haec vicina sunt cornu: unde cornea vera fingitur porta. Ea vero quae supra fortunam sunt et habent nimium ornatum vanamque iactantiam dicunt falsa esse; unde eburnea quasi ornatio porta fingitur (Serv. *ad Aen.* 6, 893).

“There is also another meaning: we know that the Dream is depicted with a horn. And those who have written on dreams say that those visions that correspond to a person’s destiny and capacity can be realized. And these resemble the horn: hence, the gate of horn is imagined as the gate of real dreams. But they say that those visions that exceed one’s destiny and are excessively ornate or vainly ostentatious are false; hence, that gate is imagined as the gate of ivory, as being too adorned”

The reference *qui de somniis scripserunt* in this passage is strictly identical with the reference that Servius had used in his note on v. 284, a coincidence in wording that suggests that in both cases Servius was evoking the same scholarly source.²⁷ This must have been a treatise that dealt in some form or other with the possible solutions for the problem of Aeneas’ exiting through the gate of false dreams in order to return to the world of the living: despite Servius’ imprecise reference (*qui de somnibus scripserunt*) and the conciseness of his summaries of the arguments, we can assume that the treatise dealt with the distinction of prophetic and false dreams with special attention to the treatment of dreams in literature. It is unlikely that the whole treatise was dedicated solely to Aeneas’ return by the ivory gate, but the discussion of this problem would have occupied a prominent place. A comparison of the two scholia shows that with regard to vv. 893–898 the treatise provided an allegorical interpretation of the choice of horn and ivory as the materials for the two gates. The fact that it examined both Aeneas’ descent and his return also implies that the treatise identified the *porta eburna* and the *vestibulum Orci*: the scholar that Servius used would have tried to extract as much arguments as possible from Vergil’s text emphasizing, in particular, the resemblance of the expressions *somnia vana* nesting on the Elm (v. 283–284) and the *insomnia falsa* that the Manes send forth through the gate of ivory (v. 896). An argumentation of this kind would justify the attempt to find a reference to the popular superstition concerning autumn dreams in the description of the Elm in the *vestibulum Orci*: if used as a supplementary piece of evidence, the idea would not look completely out of place, despite the fact that Vergil’s text (*Aen.* 6, 282–284) suggests no connection with the fall, and the epic comparison of the shades in the Underworld with autumn leaves at *Aen.* 6, 309–310 might have also been used to further strengthen the association.

Servius’ evocation of autumn dreams in his commentary to *Aen.* 6, 284, although not strictly necessary for the understanding of Vergil’s text, constitutes a trace of a fairly

²⁷ E. Jeunet-Mancy seems to accept this identification, as suggested by the cross-reference (cf. Jeunet-Mancy 2012, 201 n. 871). The use of plural is regular in unprecise references of this kind and need not imply multiple sources.

elaborated exegetical tradition on *Aen.* 6, 282–284 and 893–898. His scholium on v. 893 balances the oneiric explanation against a physiological one, probably stemming from a different source. But what was his own approach, and why did he choose, contrary to his usual practice, to evoke an opinion that was not easily deduced from Vergil’s text and abstruse? Although Servius visibly used the reference *qui de somniis scripserunt* to distance himself somewhat from the main approach and the conclusions of the treatise on dreams, it seems that he did accept several of the premises. His wording in the commentary on v. 284 (*quod per transitum tetigit*) suggests that he at least accepted the possibility that Vergil might have been alluding to the superstition on the unreliability of autumn dreams by placing the *vana Somnia* on the Elm. There is also little doubt that he agreed with the identification of the *porta eburna* with the *vestibulum Orci*,²⁸ and deduced from it that Vergil must have been emphasizing the unreliability of Aeneas’ experience in the Underworld, as his comment on the beginning of Aeneas’ descent suggests:

IN MEDIO: aut vestibulo; aut absolutum est, et intellegimus hanc esse eburneam portam per quam exiturus est. Quae res haec omnia indicat esse simulata, si et ingressus et exitus simulatus est et falsus (Serv. *ad Aen.* 6, 282).

“In the middle: either in the middle of the vestibulum; or to be taken absolutely, and we then understand that this is the gate of ivory through which he (Aeneas) will leave. Which shows that all this (i.e. Aeneas’ descent into the Underworld) is imaginary, if both the entry and the exit are imaginary and unreal.”

The last remark will be echoed in Servius’ commentary on the exit scene (cf. *vult autem intellegi falsa esse omnia quae dixit* “he implies that everything he said was false”, Serv. *ad Aen.* 6, 893), allowing us to reconstruct a deliberate attempt to present a logical, uncontradictory picture of Aeneas’ descent and return from the Hades. It is however also clear that Servius placed particular emphasis on Homer’s influence, much more than his source would have had. Thus, the grammarian specifically stated that the Vergil’s description of the gates of sleep was taken over from Homer (*est autem in hoc loco Homerum secutus* “he followed Homer in this passage”, Serv. *ad Aen.* 6, 893), and in his note on v. 284 an actual quotation from Homer is used in support of his interpretation of the epithet *vana* and the idea that the prophetic dreams must come from above:

Vana autem ideo, quia ab inferis; nam vera mittunt superi. Homerus: καὶ γὰρ τὸ ὄναρ ἐκ Διὸς ἔστίν (Serv. *ad Aen.* 6, 284).

Given the continuity of Servius’ comments on *Aen.* 6, 282–284 and 893, it is possible to conclude that his approach to Vergil’s depiction of Aeneas’ descent and return was based on two ideas: namely, that the *porta eburna* had to be identified with the *vestibulum Orci* and that the dreams sent from the Underworld were unreliable by definition, whereas the prophetic dreams were sent by Zeus. If one admits that the two ideas were part of a single interpretation, it follows that Servius would have located the door made of horn at the point where the prophetic dreams leave the heavens to appear to the dreamer, just as the false dreams leave the Hades through the gate of ivory. The *gemmae portae* would then be imagined as identical, but placed on the opposite sides of the universe, rather than side by side. This would also explain why Servius, who is generally rational and not given

²⁸ Cf. Austin 1977, 121 (*ad Aen.* 6, 284).

to mysticism, insisted on the deceptiveness of Aeneas' experience in the Underworld (*ad* v. 282 and v. 893): this exegetical approach presupposes that Aeneas had no other option than to exit the Hades through the *eburna porta*, and everything he learned there would have automatically become *vana somnia*.²⁹

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²⁹ An earlier version of this paper was read at the 46th International Philological Research Conference hosted by S.-Petersburg State University in March 2017. I am very grateful to all participants of the discussion (and particularly to Prof. A. K. Gavrilov and to D. V. Keyer) for their comments and helpful criticism. M. M. Pozdnev, S. K. Egorova and two anonymous reviewers read and commented on the article: their keen remarks have helped me to improve the argumentation.

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ОСЕННИЕ СНЫ: КОММЕНТАРИЙ СЕРВИЯ К *AEN.* 6, 282–284

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Статья посвящена античному суевию, упомянутому в комментарии Сервия (*Serv. ad Aen.* 6, 284): Сервий сообщает, ссылаясь на авторов, писавших о снах, что поздней осенью сновидения особенно ненадежны. В первой части статьи представляется обзор других упоминаний об этом народном поверье (*Plut. Quaest. conv.* 8, 10, 734d–736b; *Alciphr. Ep.* 2, 2; *Basil. Ep.* 207, 1); во второй предпринимается попытка реконструировать аргументацию источника, на который опирался Сервий (*qui de somniis scripserunt*), а также определить подход самого грамматика к данному пассажию. Показывается, что замечание о ненадежности осенних снов, пусть и не представляет ценности с точки зрения понимания вергилиевского текста, восходит к более широкой экзегетической традиции, которая, в частности, усматривала связь между *Aen.* 6, 282–284 и 6, 893–898.

Ключевые слова: Вергилий, Сервий, ворота снов, античные суеверия, Плутарх, Алкифрон, Василий Великий, Аристотель о снах, Демокрит о снах.

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