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# Moving Labyrinths: Virgil's Art of Multiple Narrative[1]

## *Labirintos moventes: a arte da narrativa múltipla de Virgílio*

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**Abstract**: In the *Aeneid* Virgil creates a complex semantic labyrinth where multiple traditions, each belonging to a separate historical or mythic context, are drawn into what appears to be a single new narrative. That new narrative is in constant dialogue with its constituent elements and so exists in a paradoxically unstable Einsteinian geography of space and time. Neither readers nor the hero Aeneas can ever be sure how to position themselves to understand what is seen or experienced. Further, as Virgil's narrative of Daedalus shows, he not only becomes, like Daedalus, a maker of, and prisoner within, labyrinths of his own design but also pressures the reader to collaborate in creating (and escaping) them.

**Keywords**: Aeneas; Daedalus; Dido; Herodotus; Labyrinth; Minotaur; Octavian; Sextus Pompey; Rome; Virgil.

**Resumo**: Na *Eneida*, Virgílio cria um labirinto semântico complexo, no qual múltiplas tradições, cada uma pertencendo a um contexto mítico e histórico separado, são elaboradas no que parece ser uma narrativa nova única. Esta nova narrativa está em constante diálogo com seus elementos constitutivos, culminando, assim, em uma geografia de espaço e tempo einsteineana paradoxalmente instável. Nem os leitores nem o herói Enéas podem estar seguros de como se posicionar para compreender o que é visto ou experimentado. Ademais, como mostra a narrativa de Virgílio sobre Dédalo,

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o primeiro, como o segundo, não apenas se torna um criador e prisioneiro dos labirintos que constrói, mas também induz o leitor a colaborar na sua criação (e na sua fuga).

**Palavras-chave**: Enéas; Dédalo; Dido; Heródoto; Labirinto; Minotauro; Otávio; Pompeu Sexto; Roma; Virgílio.

The labyrinth, an ancient, pre-Greek, and universal symbol, is part of what Jacques Attali calls a "language before writing."[2] The archetypal European labyrinth is a large complex, attributed, in myth, to an artist named Daedalus, built into a hillside on many inter-connected levels in Knossós, Crete, whose ancient coinage often showed a labyrinth symbol. The word's origins are as puzzling as the sense of puzzlement "labyrinth" conveys. The earliest attested term resembling 'labyrinth' in a Greek context, from Bronze Age Mycenae: da-pu2-ri-to-jo, has an initial "d" here rather than an "l," which some explain as "labdacism": the substitution of "l" for a different consonant.[3] But not everyone agrees.[4] To some, it is the palace of the double axes in Knossós, a definition based on a disputed etymology deriving "labyrinth" from labrys, "double axe." Whether this etymology is more plausible than that based on a reconstructed Egyptian place name *R-pr-r-ḥnt, I leave for others to decide.[5] Herodotus (*Histories* 2.148) describes a much larger labyrinth in Egypt, still functioning in historical times. The Elder Pliny (*NH* 36.

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[2] Attali (1996, p. 40-41). Cf. Eco (1986). See also Doob (1992).

[3] Cf. Valério (2017). Valério's argument bolsters the contention that the phrase *da-pu2-ri-to-jo po-ti-ni-ja* means: 'Mistress of the Labyrinth.' See Hiller (2011, p. 197).

[4] Cf. Leonhardt (2013). Leonhardt argues that the name is Semitic rather than Greek: *"Dburh"* or Deborah, as prophetess [*Judges* 4 and 5 KJV] and ruler of ancient Israel, was known as the "Queen Bee"; her priestesses were also known as Deborahs. Cf. the Minoan Bee Goddess... In Greek mythology, descendants of the Bee Goddess included Cybele, Demeter, and Rhea, who were known as the *Melissae*, from μέλισσα (Melissa) (Attic μέλιττα) "a bee". Cf*.,* on LinA, the compound variations a.di.ki.te.te.du.pu2.re and ja-di.ki.te.te.du.pu2.re and their possible associations with the bee symbol of Minoan culture. The association of *me-ri* with *da-pu2-ri-to-jo* compels an acceptance of the collateral meaning of μελί *meli* "honey" as a type of liquid offering or contribution."

[5] See Bernal (2008, p. 64); Herodotus 2. 148; Pliny *NH* 36. 85-6; 88. Suggestions by modern scholars, notably Wunderlich (2007), that the palace at Knossós was itself a

85-86) says some thought this Egyptian palace was a temple of the Sun, others a royal tomb or palace, and that it was the model (but a hundred times bigger) for Daedalus' Cretan labyrinth. Diodorus Siculus adds that Daedalus was listed by the Egyptians among the visitors there, as were Musaeus, Orpheus, Homer, Pythagoras, and Plato (*Historical Library* 1.96.1-2). The lower areas included crypts where the bodies of the kings who built it were buried – as in a European cathedral. Herodotus says the priests would not let him visit them. The Egyptian labyrinth is, Pliny notes, a terrifying place, "most of which has to be crossed in darkness": *maiore...parte transitus est in tenebris* (*NH* 36. 88). A similar labyrinth tomb made by Lars Porsenna, the Etruscan King (and enemy of Rome), is said to have existed in Italy near Clusium (Chiusi). Pliny describes it in the words of Virgil's older contemporary, Varro (*NH* 36. 91-93): "The labyrinth is inextricable. Anyone entering without a ball of thread could not find his way out: *labyrinthum inextricabile, quo si quis introierit sine glomere lini, exitum invenire nequeat*." Virgil surely knew this Etruscan labyrinth. He too echoes Varro in *Aeneid* 6.27.

Throughout antiquity "labyrinth" suggests more than a static maze even in domestic mosaics. Rebecca Molholt observes: "Large-scale labyrinth mosaics… interact with both architecture and their spectators, deliberately eliding boundaries between life and myth for those who crossed their surfaces."[6] They are things we walk on and not just gaze at, invested with power to move or change and create movement or change. In the Elder Pliny – ever an inspiration for Jorge Luis Borges, "the greatest labyrinthologist of the present day,"[7] – we find "labyrinth" as a walk marked out on a complex patterns of tiles and the name of a ceremonial game performed by young Roman riders in the Campus Martius (*NH* 36. 91-93). Virgil creates a poetic image of this game in *Aeneid* 5. 588-595:

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necropolis are generally ignored even though mythic tradition unanimously associates the labyrinth with ritual death.

[6] Cf. Molholt (2011).

[7] "Il più grande labirintologo contemporaneo", Angelino (2003, p. 119) citing P. Rosenstiehl "Labirinto" in *Enciclopedia,* 8, Einaudi, Turin, 1979, p. 3-30 (7) .

> There was a labyrinth once, it's reported, in Crete, land of mountains,
> Crossed by a road threading blindly amid blank walls, and dividing
> Into a thousand routes as a ruse to deprive you of guiding
> Signposts and hope of return as you strayed in a maze beyond mind's grasp.
> Such are the textures of tracks intertwining that sons of the Teucrians
> Weave in their patterns of rout and attack in their games when they gallop,
> Much as dolphins at play in Carpathian or Libyan seaways,
> Cutting their way up and down through the waves.

Virgil's description probably derives from Etruscan practise. An Etruscan vase depicting a maze and cavalry is inscribed *Truia*: taken to mean "complex movement" or "maze dance" in Etruscan. Romans may have connected *truia* and *Troia*, and celebrated the *truia* dance as the "Game of Troy."[8] But since Virgil pointedly calls the Trojans here not "Dardanians" (of mythic, Etruscan provenance through an ancestor, Dardanus), but "Teucrians," (and thus of mythic, Cretan provenance), he links them with the Cretan labyrinth too. Indeed, the playing dolphins of his simile recall the dolphin frescoes at Knossós. Virgil's choreographed, moving labyrinth anticipates his description of Daedalus' architectural labyrinth – itself the portal to a labyrinthine underworld, where the unborn and the dead mingle, where future and past merge. Myth and history crisscross.[9]

The rich poetic and philosophical possibilities of labyrinthine imagery have long been explored by poets (and other writers), philosophers, musicians, and filmmakers especially in politically charged discourse where strictly linear – what I would call "dissociative" – writing will not suffice to communicate safely and effectively about difficult issues in difficult times. Yet there remains a deeply entrenched tendency among scholars to reduce the plural to the binary: to translate Aristotle's *mythos* as "plot" in the discussion of tragedy and epic rather than allow *mythos* its more richly "associative" mythic complexities, contradictions, and paradoxes that "myth" suggests.[10]

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[8] Cf. Heller and Cairns (1969, p. 261-62).
[9] See also my earlier discussions: Ahl (2007= VIRGIL 2007, p. 360-65); Ahl (2010).
[10] Cf. Ahl (2011); Ahl (2012); Boa (2011).

Virgil's Daedalus epitomizes, in miniature, the uneasy relationships between artists and powerful patrons that prevail in the world of artistic patronage, where creative genius struggles to achieve itself. Daedalus, like his writer-creator, must cope with the often conflicting demands of his ruler(s), and his sense of his own artistic self. Daedalus is eventually imprisoned in his own labyrinthine creation, able to escape only because his design, like a garden maze, assumes its visitors are pedestrians.

Let us follow Daedalus as he flies off to Chalcis (*Aeneid* 6.14-19):

> Daedalus, so rumor has it, when fleeing from Minos's kingdom,
> Dared put his faith in the heavens, and birdlike, on ominous swift wings,[15]
> Sailed an unusual course not by but towards the cold Bear Stars.
> Since he first gently alit on the hilltops of Chalcis, when landing
> Back on the earth, it was here, and to you, Phoebus, he dedicated
> Wings that had served him as oars and a temple of massive proportions.

Despite an editorial aside, "so rumor has it," Virgil departs from tradition by making Cumae, Chalcis' colony, Daedalus' first landing place after fleeing Crete on wings he invented (6.14-19), just as he departs from tradition in bringing Aeneas to the same area. Servius, citing Sallust, says Daedalus went first to Sardinia, then to Cumae. Diodorus 4.77 and Pausanias (*Description of Greece*, 7.4.6) have him land in Sicily and do not mention Cumae at all. Daedalus flies *praepetibus pennis*, "on ominous swift wings" (6.15), says Virgil, using the terminology of augury as if Daedalus, by using wings, had become a bird of omen himself.

A bird is of good omen either because it flies directly toward its goal or because it seeks a special place to settle, according to Aulus Gellius (*Attic Nights* 7.6).[11] Was Daedalus' flight well omened, and itself a good omen? His unique navigation steers him *towards* not *by* the Greater and Lesser Bear Constellations, which ancient poets claimed (implausibly) were the stars by which sailors set their courses (6.14-19). The odd way of describing his means of propulsion, *remigium alarum,*

[11] Virgil revisits this theme when Aeneas follows ominous birds Venus sends to guide him to the golden bough (6.190-204).

"rowing equipment of wings," is also used of Mercury's flight in 1.300-301. The Greeks called what we call the "blade" of an oar its *pteryx*, its "wing" (Apollonius, *Argonautica* 4.929); in Latin *ala.* Oarage of wings, in the sense of oar-blades, re-acquires the nautical flavor it had in Apollonius in the context of Avernus in Virgil's day, when the lake became the base for Octavian's newly built galleys. Yet Virgil's words recall Lucretius (*On the Nature of Things* 6.740-46), where birds fall from the sky into lake Avernus "forgetful of their oarage of wings." Over Avernus, birds cease to be ominous or even to exist as birds – hence Virgil's reminder that Avernus, derived from Greek *Aornos*, means "without birds" (6.242).[12] Virgil's echo of Lucretius gains poignancy if we recall that Daedalus arrives alone and grief-stricken at Cumae because he has lost his son Icarus, who soared too close to the sun, lost his wings, and fell into the Icarian Sea. Birds fall into the lake of death, named Avernus, "birdless," for the absence of birds, as Icarus falls from the sky into the sea named for his death. Since the Icarian Sea is neither on any direct flight path between Crete and the Bay of Naples nor Daedalus' intended destination, the artist's flight meets neither of Gellius' criteria for a good omen. And to complicate matters, the Chalcis where Daedalus lands isn't really Chalcis, but a colony of Chalcis in Italy that has not yet been founded. Daedalus has migrated; Chalcis will migrate.

Virgil goes on to describe the doors on the temple Daedalus dedicated to Apollo: doors that mark the beginning of Aeneas' encounter with Avernus' world of death, as the Gates of Sleep at the end of the book mark its conclusion (6.26-30):

> On the doors is Androgeos' murder; then Cecrops's children [20]
> Ordered – and how grim it was – to pay out as a penalty, each year,
> Seven live bodies of sons. Over there stands the urn, with the lots drawn.
> Opposite, balancing these, raised up from the sea: Cretan Knossós.
> Here's cruel love for a bull, here's Pasiphaë under him, mated
> Guilefully; here is her hybrid child, showing traits of both parents: [25]
> Named Minotaur, monumental reminder of Venus perverted.
> Here is the beast's house, an intricate puzzle, defying solution.

[12] Many editors excise this line because it explicates the etymologizing play.

> Daedalus pitied a ruler in her great love. He untangled
> Ruses and structural mazes and ruled them a route upon unseen
> Tracks with a guiding thread.

The first motif is the death of Androgeos, king Minos' son, killed in Attica either by defeated athletic rivals or when sent by Aegeus of Athens against the Bull of Marathon, a monster subsequently killed by Aegeus' son, Theseus (ps.-Apollodorus, *Library* 3.15.7). What follows, then, is Minos' revenge. The (only) Greek whom Aeneas identifies as killed by himself and his allies during the sack of Troy is also an Androgeos; and someone, possibly Aeneas, stripped him and put on his armor (*Aeneid* 2. 371). While Lucretius uses *daedalus* as an adjective describing the creative and artistic powers of earth itself: the "Daedal" earth, Virgil makes Daedalus an Athenian artist constrained to serve a Cretan king and to accommodate the sexual tastes of the king's family. The common tradition, echoed by Virgil, is that Daedalus pities Pasiphaë's love for a bull, a passion brought upon her by Poseidon because Minos refuses to sacrifice to him.[13] Euripides' *Cretans* probably began with the discovery of the Minotaur's birth and ended with the flight of Daedalus and Icarus from Crete.[14] We know of at least three Greek comedies entitled *Daedalus*: by Aristophanes, the comic writer Plato, and either Eubulus or Philippus.[15] Sophocles also wrote a now lost *Daedalus*, possibly a satyr play.[16] And this may be of particular interest, since Virgil, in *Eclogues* 6. 45-60, tells how Silenus, leader of the satyrs, consoles Pasiphaë with love for a white bull whose attention she seeks desperately to attract.

Daedalus generally makes Pasiphaë a hollow wooden cow on wheels, into which she can climb, to entice the otherwise disinterested

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[13] See Apollodorus 3.1.3-4; Pasiphaë's name in Greek = "she who is seen by everyone." See Armstrong (2006).

[14] Cf. Collard and Cropp (2008). Euripides' *Polyidus* is another tale of Daedalus' dealings with the family of Minos.

[15] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 6.26.5; Aristophanes' *Daedalus* probably did not deal with the story of Pasiphaë. See Henderson (2007, p. 334-39).

[16] Cf. Lloyd-Jones (2003, p. 64-65).

bovine to make love to her.[17] He then designs the labyrinth to contain the monstrous offspring of her passion, named Minotaur. Finally, he takes pity on Ariadne, a daughter of Minos in love with Theseus, one of the victims sent from Athens, and helps Theseus kill the Minotaur and escape the labyrinth. This was the topic of Euripides' lost *Theseus*.[18] Daedalus is punished by Minos for aiding Ariadne and imprisoned, but escapes from Crete with his son Icarus. Aristophanes' lost *Cocalus* told of Daedalus' triumph over Minos in Sicily, where Daedalus masterminds the killing of Minos by Coccalus' daughters.[19]

The examples of "daedal" art Virgil alludes to either extend human energies by harnessing them to a device or allow humans to fulfill their passions by enclosing them within an artificial or alien frame. The results may prove good: escape for Daedalus; but they often prove bad: death for Icarus or the creation of the Minotaur. Virgil uses the adjective *daedala* of Circe (*Aeneid* 7.282-83), when she transforms men into the shape of beasts but leaves the human trapped within.[20] The Minotaur itself is a "monumental reminder of Venus perverted" in *Aeneid* 6.26, where the goddess' name (as often in Lucretius) signifies "sex." But if we rationalize the goddess in Venus to "sex," we lose specificity vital for Lucretius and Virgil. Venus is the "mother of Aeneas' people" in Lucretius, as she is mother of Aeneas and ancestor of two Caesars in the Aeneid and in Julian propaganda: *Aeneadum genetrix*, "the birthing force of Aeneas' people" (Lucretius 1.1), and thus the equivalent of "*daedal* Nature" herself: *natura daedala rerum* (Lucretius 5.234). We don't see this force in Greek because *physis*, though translated by Romans as *natura*, is not so much a "birthing force," as a "begetting force."

In using the word *error* (*Aeneid* 6.27) for Daedalus' labyrinth, Virgil indicates the mental as well as physical wanderings of those

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[17] Apollodorus *loc. cit.* and *Epitome* 1.7-9*;* Hyginus 40.3-4; Ovid *AA.* 1.325-6; Propertius 4.7.57-58; Plutarch, *Theseus* 17-23; Diodorus 4.61.4-5.

[18] Cf. Collard and Cropp (2008, p. 415-27). Catullus 64. 52-264; Ovid *AA.* 1.527-64; *Heroides* 10.

[19] Cf. Henderson (2007, p. 280-87).

[20] The Trojan horse extends this idea. See also Apuleius, *Metamorphoses, The Golden Ass,* and Lucian, *Lucius the Ass*.

who design (or enter) mazes, a notion expanded in *ambages,* meaning "misleading pathways," in *Aeneid* 6.29 and "misleading words" in 6.99. But there is more. Daedalus' labyrinth hides and houses a monster he helped create. He is ruined by his success in accommodating the conflicting whims of the powerful, much as Arachne is ruined in Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 6.1-145) by challenging (and, in onlookers' judgments, defeating) her divine rival, Minerva, in a public weaving contest to depict "truths" about the god. Weaving is, in Classical antiquity, a woman's art – in contrast to the craftsmanship in harder materials practiced by Daedalus and Pygmalion – the province of Penelope, Circe, Arachne, and Philomela.[21] Ovid's Philomela, in contrast to Arachne, achieves her goal of private and covert communication with her sister, and through it revenge, by weaving her terrible story (*Metamorphoses* 6.424-674).[22] What Daedalus does with art and engineering Lucretius, Virgil, and Ovid do with language. The poet's craft is "the *daedal* tongue of words": *verborum daedala lingua* (Lucretius 4.551). While Ovid's Arachne is arguably innocent (in all but pride), and justified in her tapestry's condemnation of the gods, Virgil's Daedalus is, no less arguably, as guilty as the masters he serves. As a speaker, probably Minos, observes in a fragment of Euripides' *Cretans* (fr. 988): "Although you were a builder, you were not really doing woodwork."

When Virgil describes Daedalus' handiwork, several levels of artistic creation face one another. Although it's clear that Aeneas is surveying the artwork, Virgil delivers his own rather than Aeneas' view of it, commenting on what we might assume is a pictorial autobiography of his fellow artist Daedalus. But it is really a description of never existing Daedalan doors on a never existing Daedalan temple: it is the *daedal* poet reflecting upon his own artistic invention, presenting his "own" authorial description of his own invented artworks, with his own comment. He gives us a further perspective on his artistic intent, in telling us what would have been there if grief had permitted (*Aeneid* 6.31-33):

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[21] See my earlier and fuller discussion: Ahl (1985, p. 224-30).

[22] Cf. Ahl (1985, p. 224)

> You, Icarus, too would have figured
> Large in this masterly work, if his rueful pain had permitted.
> Twice he attempted to shape what befell you, in golden relief-work;
> Twice, what fell were your father's hands...

*Casus*, often used figuratively to mean "event" or in Epicurean terms "chance," also carries its literal sense "fall" (hence my translation "befell") in the context of this myth. The "event" Virgil records is not the omitted fall of Icarus, but the falling of Daedalus' hands. He does not complete Daedalus' picture, but shows us why Daedalus' picture is incomplete through a feigned editorial glimpse of Daedalus' artistic failure as he struggles against pain to represent his son's death. Daedalus, like Aeneas in *Aeneid* 2, is reluctant to relive painful memories by narrating them. But a narrative so edited falsifies the events it describes. If Daedalus omits Icarus entirely, his flight appears to be a triumph. If he includes Icarus, but omits his fall, viewers must supply what the artist has omitted and explain why it is missing. Those unfamiliar with the myth will be puzzled and their eyes will misinterpret the picture.

Virgil is, I think, providing us a model for reading his own authorial narrative and perhaps a sense of his own guilt as an artist who must serve a powerful and often unscrupulous master. As lacework, unlike a tapestry, is not just a labyrinth of threads and cross-threads but of intricately planned spaces, so *Aeneid* 6, more than any other book in the epic, relies on readers to grasp that its spaces, its moments of silence, are part of its design. We are left to adduce from our own knowledge information the poet himself does not, for whatever reasons, provide. We must collaborate in the creation of the *Aeneid* and find clues to help us navigate his labyrinth. The *Aeneid*, like a computer game, is an interactive work.

Virgil concludes this section with a description of the Sibyl's arrival (6.33-37):

> They'd have scanned every detail
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> Had not Achates, sent in advance, now arrived, bringing with him
> Glaucus's daughter, Deïphobê, priest to the Goddess of Crossroads [35]
> And to Apollo. She said to the king: "Your casual sightseeing isn't
> What this occasion demands [*non hoc tempus spectacula poscit*]."

The Sibyl sarcastically but aptly suggests Aeneas is playing the tourist at Cumae. When Statius, a century after Virgil, asks his wife to join him in Naples (*Silvae* 3.5), he names the Sibylline oracle at Cumae as a nearby *tourist attraction*, along with the fashionable resort of Baiae (*Silvae* 3.5.95-7). Ovid writes of "the pattern-fringed beaches of (neighboring) Baiae: *praetextaque litora Baiis*" in *Art of Love* 1.255. And we note that Aeneas' ships form a "patterned fringe on the shore: *litora curvae praetexunt puppes*" like that of a toga, when they arrive (*Aeneid* 6.4-5). Umbricius in Juvenal *Satire* 3 finds Rome too crowded, and Cumae, where Daedalus shed his tired wings: *fatigatas ubi Daedalus exuit alas* (3.25), too empty. Juvenal congratulates Umbricius, for fleeing from Rome to Cumae "giving the Sibyl at least one fellow citizen and a nice retreat by a pleasant beach at the gateway to Baiae: *unum civem donare Sibyllae / ianua Baiarum est et gratum litus amoeni/ secessus"* (*Satires* 3.3-5). The only company Virgil's Sibyl has is Aeneas and his companions. Except for a brief historical period when Octavian's fleet brought a bustle of activity, the same was true in Roman historical times. Cumae was a ghost town.

This theme of cities founded after Aeneas' time but destroyed before Virgil's persists throughout the epic. Virgil's mythic eye sees the world differently from our historically and artistically trained eyes. We want cities as they were during a particular year, decade, or century, depending on our focus and on the exactness permitted by the evidence. Virgil depicts cities not stabilized in particular eras, much as Roman painters may avoid committing to a particular vanishing point. A clear example is introduced by Anchises, himself a ghost, at *Aeneid* 6.773-776:

> These men will found Nomentum for you, Gabii and Fidenae.
> These will place Collatia's fortress high on the hilltops,
> Also Pometia and Castrum Inui, Bola and Cora. [775]
> They will exist in the future as names; now they're lands, but they're nameless
> (*Hae tum nomina erunt nunc sunt sine nomine terrae*)

All eight cities Virgil names were members of the Latin League, *Latinum nomen*, and all (including Alba) had been destroyed by Rome, abandoned, or absorbed into other communities by Virgil's day. Thus

*nomen* signifies both "name" and "league." Lucan, in a brilliant variation on this passage, makes the same point more explicit (*Pharsalia* 7. 391-408): "*tunc omne Latinum / fabula nomen erit*: then the Latin League/ name will be folk-tale" (7.391-92).[23] The cities, once substance without name, are now names without substance: "ghost towns," like the Cumae where Aeneas arrives in *Aeneid* 6. 1-13:[24]

> So he declares as he weeps. Then he lets the fleet run under full sail,
> Finally putting ashore at Euboea's colony, Cumae.
> Prows veer round to face seaward; then anchors secure all the vessels
> Fast to the land with the bite of their teeth. Curved sterns add a patterned
> Fringe to the seashore. A handful of youths, blazing eager, [5]
> Flashes ashore onto Twilight's Land. Some strike for the dormant
> Seeds of a flame in a flint vein; others tear off into forests,
> Wildlife's dense-roofed homes, find streams, point out their locations.
> Righteous Aeneas, though, heads for the citadel's heights where Apollo
> Rules, and towards a huge cave, the secluded haunt of the Sibyl. [10]
> She sends a shiver through distant hearts. For the seer of Delos
> Breathes into her the great force of his mind, disclosing the future.
> They're in the grove now, the gilded shrine of the Goddess of Crossroads.

Although the prophet Helenus (according to Aeneas) had instructed Aeneas to land at Cumae (*Aeneid* 3.441), Aeneas arrives there more or less by accident. He notices, at the end of *Aeneid* 5, that his helmsman Palinurus is gone. After steering the ship himself for a while, he lets the fleet run free, giving up control of his destiny and destination. When he arrives at Cumae (*Aeneid* 6. 1-37) he has been drifting through the seas (and through time) and has no idea where he is. There are few clues, since he has come to his unknown destination either centuries too soon or a few years too late, depending on one's narrative goals. True, Virgil identifies the place as Cumae and describes it as a Euboean colony (6.2). But he probably knows, as does Livy, that Cumae was the first

[23] Ahl (1976, p. 214-222).

[24] Anchises lists eight cities founded by Alba Longa; so Cato (*Origines* 2.58). Pliny (*NH* 3.5.69) has 20 and Dionysius (5.61.3) has 29 (which, with Alba, make up the League's 30 cities). Of Virgil's eight, *Castrum Inui* and *Fidenae* are omitted by others.

Greek colony in Italy (and the traditional site where the Latin alphabet was adapted from Greek), founded by settlers from Chalcis in Euboea around 750 BC (*History of Rome* 8.22.5; 9.22) – about the time Rome was founded by Romulus. This is not good timing for Aeneas. But then there's the problem that the fall of Troy generally agreed in Virgil's day was 1184 BC. In this perspective, Aeneas arrives in Cumae before there is a Cumae. Not surprisingly, he finds no inhabitants – except the Sibyl, who is a little premature herself. Like a Kurt Vonnegut hero, he has become "unstuck in time."

Details crowd these opening lines, all multiply resonant, not ornamental. A "handful" of youths (*manus*, "hand, band") comes ashore. The large and small senses of *manus* indicate how few there are to search for, and strike fire from, flint. Youths, Servius notes (*ad loc.*), are important; older Trojans stayed in Sicily. They flash like sparks from flint, looking for flint to spark "seeds of flame" – the phrase echoes *Odyssey* 5.490: Odysseus, washed ashore in the unknown fictional Phaeacia, hides in leaves "as a peasant hides his firebrand among embers so it will be alive the next day." *Silex*, "flint," is also the name for lava rock (Italian: *selce*) found in the area. Young "sparks" look like flame in flint, which itself lurks in *selce*. Movements are violent. Another group *rapit*, "tears into," forests, "the tall buildings (*tecta*) of animals," seeking not just wild game or water but also wood (for fires or building camps): *lignatio* is a term for a (military) wood-gathering expedition. We'll see a massive *lignatio* for a funeral pyre (6.176-82). But the details get odder. Some youths, Virgil says, marvel at streams they encounter (6.7). There were no streams there until Virgil's day, when a waterway was built between Lake Avernus and the Lucrine Lake. Virgil knew this. He observes: "*Iulia … unda immittitur aestus Avernis*: Julian…waters gush into Avernus" (*Georgics* 2.161-64).[25] Aeneas' men find these waters a millennium early. But why are they "Julian"?

[25] Velleius (2.79) mentions Agrippa's undertaking and Dio Cassius (48.49-51) gives details.

Strabo, who visited Cumae and Avernus around 37 BC, comments on the vast changes there (*Geography* 5.4.5):[26]

> People before my time used to make Avernus (the Birdless Place) setting for the fabulous story of the Homeric *Nekuia*… writers tell us there was an oracle of the dead there, visited by Odysseus. Nowadays Lake Avernus is deep right up to the shore and has a clear outlet, having the size and character of a harbor because Lake Lucrinus lies before it and is rather shallow and long. Avernus is enclosed by steep hills rising above it on all sides except where you sail into it. Now cultivated, they were formerly thick with a wild and untrodden forest of large trees. The hills and human superstition made the lake a shadowy place. And locals added the tale that all birds that fly over it fall into the water, killed by rising vapors, as in all underworld sites. People supposed this too was an underworld site... Only those who had sacrificed and propitiated the underworld gods could sail into Avernus, and the priests who leased the area gave directions in all such matters; there is potable water here, by the sea, but people abstained from it because they thought it the water of the Styx... Such was the mythic aura earlier generations created. But now that Agrippa has cut down the woods surrounding Avernus, and the lands built up, and a subterranean channel cut from Avernus to Cumæ, all that is left is the myth. Perhaps Cocceius, who made this subterranean channel passage… fancied it was natural that roads here should be underground. Lake Lucrinus broadens out as far as Baiae, shut off from the sea by a mound eight stadia long and broad as a wagon road... It was vulnerable to surges during storms, so Agrippa built it higher. Only light boats can access the lake. It's useless for mooring, but great for oysters.

The brilliant, indeed, Daedalan architect Lucius Cocceius Auctus, designer of the Pantheon, engineered these labyrinthine channels, the *crypta neapolitana,* to connect Avernus and Cumae. He also engineered, in 37 BC, the formidable structures for Octavian's naval base, which Virgil alludes to in *Aeneid* 6.42-44: "Mined from a Euboean cliff's

[26] We know he was in Rome in 36 BC because he attended the execution of Selurus (Strabo, *Geography* 6.2.6), which occurred that year.

broad flank is a cavern of vast size. / Into it lead a full hundred broad-shanked shafts, a full hundred / Mouths; out spills the same tally of voices: the Sibyl's responses." Virgil has incorporated Auctus' Daedalan engineering into his setting to re-mystify what Octavian and Agrippa had demysticized without erasing its demystification. He often calls Italy the Twilight Land, *Hesperia*. Though this name is used exclusively of Italy by Virgil's contemporary Dionysius of Halicarnassus, it also suggests "the land of the dead". Indeed, "The Sunset God" in Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus* 178 is Death.

Further details in 6.3-5 are worth attention. Scholars assume Virgil's phrase describing Aeneas' actions on the coast, *fundabat naves*, must mean: "began securing the ships to land," though they know it would normally mean: "began laying down keels for vessels." If we keep Virgil's phrasing, we can open up more perspectives. For Agrippa's deforestation and Auctus' engineering at Cumae and on lake Avernus were undertaken to replace warships lost in Octavian's struggle with Sextus Pompeius Magnus Pius, aka Sextus Pompey. Octavian had to build a new navy, then rebuild it almost totally at least once, trying to establish his domination "with barely a vessel to his name, while a wily and able opponent held the waters round about with a force of over two hundred."[27] That made for lots of *lignatio* around Avernus.

Virgil never names Sextus Pompeius Magnus Pius in the *Aeneid* – though the omnipresent adjective *pius* used as Aeneas' epithet might have stirred memories of him in Virgil's contemporary readers. Nor does Octavian name him (or Antony or Brutus) in his *Res Gestae*.[28] It's not that he was unimportant. There was a conference between Sextus, Octavian, Mark Antony, and Lepidus aboard Sextus' flagship anchored off Misenum, a port, Virgil says, named for the great glory of Misenus, Aeneas' friend whose death was honored with a huge pyre after a *lignatio* that would have yielded several ships (*Aeneid* 6.212-236). Appropriately, Misenum remained the fleet headquarters until its sack by the Saracens

[27] Cf. Casson (1991, p. 184).

[28] Galinsky (1969) never mentions Sextus; Powell (2008) has much that is useful but, in my judgment, misreads Virgil's approach to him.

in AD 915. At the conference, Sextus' lieutenant Menas (also called Metrodorus) offered to cut the moorings and abduct the three enemy leaders. Sextus declined, noting that Menas should have done so without asking (Plutarch *Antony* 32.4; Appian 5.8). Had Sextus taken up the offer, Western history would have been changed totally.

Octavian fought hard against Sextus for six years and nearly lost several times, including a great defeat off Cumae in 38 BC.[29] Roman and most Greek writers (Velleius, Lucan, and Dio Cassius) had little sympathy for Sextus Pompey, regardless of political sympathies. The main exception is Appian, as Alain Gower argues.[30] R. J. A. Wilson comments: "the surviving ancient sources, following the Augustan propaganda line, depict Sextus Pompey as a ruthless freebooter determined to exploit the island to further his own ends."[31] Velleius describes him in 2.73.1 as "freedman of his freedmen and slave of his slaves: *libertorum suorum libertus servorumque servus*," overlooking the fact that his opponents lured at least as many slaves into their service. Octavian declares (*RG* 25.1) that he himself "made the sea free of pirates" and that "he captured and restored to their masters…almost 30,000 escaped slaves who had taken up arms against the state." Brunt and Moore tell us Sextus' fleets were largely manned by slaves (if they had added "escaped," we would see that they were willingly employed). Octavian captured and crucified 6,000 and returned the rest to their masters.[32] Brunt and Moore don't mention Suetonius' comment (*DA* 16.1) that Octavian once freed and trained as oarsmen 20,000 slaves after he lost, in 38 BC, a substantial part of his naval forces to a double shipwreck and a military defeat by Sextus off the very coast of Cumae where Aeneas lands. And Octavian lured Pompey's admiral Menas (Menodorus) to his side to command his fleet. Appian's account of the capture of Sardinia twice in the same year (40 BC) from Octavian's general by that same Menodorus while he was fighting on Pompey's side is similarly illustrative. Octavian's

[29] Paget (1970).
[30] Cf. Gowing (1992).
[31] Cf. Wilson (1990, p. 33).
[32] Cf. Brunt and Moore (1997, p. 66).

commander in Sicily, named Helenus, was probably a freedman too, and definitely Greek.

Sextus rallied to his cause the remnants of Brutus and Cassius' army and the Spanish forces and Cilician pirates his father had defeated – who, like so many defeated enemies of Roman generals, moved speedily from conquered foes to loyal allies. Above all he saw himself as avenging his father's death, which he had witnessed. His earliest coins (around 45 BC) proclaim his *pietas*. Sextus' coinage established his claim to *pietas* much as Brutus's coinage gave him *libertas*. Octavian had to reach for other abstracts. The reverse of Sextus' most common coins shows Neptune flanked by two men, each holding a person on his shoulders, one a man, the other a woman. G. F. Hill identified them as mythical brothers famous for *pietas* in rescuing father and mother from an eruption of Etna.[33] This silver denarius issue outweighs and outdoes Caesar's issue of 47-6 BC (Aeneas carrying Anchises). Sextus underscored his *pietas* with a motif dear to his local supporters, not a self-aggrandizing and remotely mythical motif. Octavian didn't try to propagandize his own *pietas*. Although he called Caesar his parent in the *Res Gestae*, everyone knew he was not Caesar's child. Aside from the Metelli Pii, whose cognomen was more remote in origin, Sextus Pompey was the Roman whose name was conjured by the adjective *pius* in Virgil's day. And since *pius* is often Virgil's epithet for Aeneas, there would be constant shifting of focus in ancient readers' thoughts as Virgil lured them into his temporal labyrinths where centuries, peoples and actions blend, especially in the necromancy of *Aeneid* 6. For the pious Sextus is famous for his own supposedly historical encounters with the dead in Pliny *NH* 7.178-179, given epic form by Lucan in *Pharsalia* 6.729-826 (AHL 1976, p. 130-89).

As Caesar and Octavian used Venus and Apollo as "official" deities, Sextus called himself son of Neptune and showed on his *denarii* the head of Neptune with a trident. Octavian might not have found allusions to either Sextus or Neptune amusing. Appian (*BC* 5.98) says that before a great storm wrecked his fleet off Cape Palinurus, Octavian

[33] Cf. Hill (1903, Pl. XV. 9) "issued by Sextus Pompeius in Sicily, and perhaps actually struck in Catana itself … (42-36 B.C.)"; cf. Powell (2008, p. 93-97).

sacrificed, to no avail, to Neptune and Waveless Ocean; Suetonius (*DA* 16) notes that after defeat by Sextus in 38 Octavian yanked the image of Neptune out of the procession to the Circus Maximus and that after news of the disastrous storm he declared: "I'll win this war whatever Neptune may do." Only later did Octavian feel more comfortable with Neptune, after his victories over Sextus at Naulochus in 36 BC. But readers may well have gasped when Virgil introduces Aeneas into the *Aeneid* during a storm which leads to shipwreck when he and his men are just out of sight of Sicily, and when his ships have to be rescued by Octavian's least favorite (and Sextus Pompey's most favorite) deity, Neptune, who is promptly compared, in the first simile of the epic, to Octavian!

Nor would the name of Aeneas' helmsman Palinurus, the account of whose death ends with the opening line of *Aeneid* 6, have been without its effect upon Octavian. In 36 BC, Dio (*Roman History* 49.1) narrates, Octavian, en route to Sicily, "was hit by a great storm while passing the Palinurus promontory. It destroyed many ships and Menas/Menodorus, falling upon the rest in their confusion, burned or towed many away." Velleius says much the same (*Compendium of Roman History* 2.79.3), as does Appian, who adds that Octavian took refuge in the harbor of Velia, where he tried to rescue his troops and repair his fleet (*Roman History* 5.98). Velia is where Virgil's Palinurus washes ashore, as he tells Aeneas who sees his ghost at the edge of the underworld. But Palinurus' account of how he fell from the ship in stormy seas (*Aeneid* 6.337-383) is very different from Virgil's authorial account in *Aeneid* 5.835-871, in which Palinurus falls asleep at the helm. It is hard to imagine that Octavian would have been unmoved by Palinurus' "stormy sea" version, since he would have recalled pulling himself ashore after being wrecked on the South Italian coast. But the authorial account is a different matter. Octavian, notoriously, fell asleep the night before his victory at Naulochus in 36 BC and had to be awoken to give the call for battle and was taunted by Mark Antony that he had slept while Agrippa won the battle for him (Suetonius *DA* 16).

In sum: Aeneas, like Octavian, had some bad luck with ships, particularly in Sicilian and Italian waters. Rebellious Trojan women burn part of Aeneas' fleet on Sicily in *Aeneid* 5.606-720. Perhaps the spirits of Avernus would forgive Octavian for the destruction of timbered

land around Avernus, as Cybele forgives Aeneas in *Aeneid* 9.83-89 for having deforested Ida to sail from Troy. At least Agrippa built Octavian more ships. But Cybele "saves" the remainder of Aeneas' Idaean fleet from Turnus' fires by turning them into water nymphs, of limited use in naval combat.

The centripetal narratives of the *Aeneid* create a work of immense complexity. I hope I have been able to suggest a template for a new approach to the epic that will encourage further exploration. For the same world of multiple and simultaneous times is evident in every theme from the first to the last book. In *Aeneid* 1 Aeneas arrives in Carthage as it is being founded in mythic tradition and after it has been destroyed in history: he is there both too early and too late, as at Cumae: before the "time" of his birth and after "the time" of his death. Carthage was, traditionally, founded over three centuries after Troy's fall in 814 BC – though Troy and Carthage were represented as contemporaneous in some earlier poets. But the date of its destruction is fixed: 146 BC. His mother, Venus, disguises Aeneas in a cloud as he walks into this city where he observes unobserved. His invisibility both recalls how he is protected from foes at Troy in *Iliad* 5 and 20 and reminds us that he does not really exist in this time frame. Since Carthage is moved backwards in time from a Carthaginian perspective and forward from a Trojan perspective, both Dido and Aeneas are out of their proper "zones." The Carthaginians Aeneas sees are building a theater to stage plays centuries before there are plays to stage. The columns they use for sets feature in Roman, not Greek (much less Punic) theaters, and are of Virgil's day, not Aeschylus'. Rome's first permanent stone theater was not built until 55 BC; a second was rising as Virgil wrote. In this world it is Aeneas and the Romans-to-be that are perfidious, not the Carthaginians.

Aeneas' arrival at and departure from Carthage not only becomes the mythic cause for the historical hostility between Rome and Carthage, but also affords Queen Dido the pretext for calling Aeneas perfidious (*Aeneid* 4.30. Accusations of perfidy were fundamental to Roman propaganda against Carthage during the Punic Wars. And "Punic trustworthiness" was proverbial for "bad faith." SoVirgil's Punic Dido

shifts responsibility for bad faith from the founder of Carthage to the ancestor of Rome (*Aeneid* 4.316) whose relocation in time make him also a co-founder of Carthage. For what Aeneas sees from inside his cloud recalls programs in Rome and at a newly-founded *Roman* Carthage, begun by Julius Caesar, restored and continued by Octavian. Roman Carthage had a theater; the old Punic Carthage didn't.[34] Virgil has created a labyrinthine garden not of forking paths whereby a single person may live out all decisions he or she has ever made, but a garden of converging paths where multiple mythic and historical beings and narratives merge into a single mythic hero and narrative that, brilliantly and paradoxically, remain capable of being also the narrative of all persons and narratives absorbed. Virgil names some but not others. Just as his emperor's official memoir, the *Res Gestae*, does not name Sextus Pompey, neither does the *Aeneid*. Yet Virgil leaves enough traces of Sextus in book 6 to show us, and also his emperor, that the *Aeneid* tells Sextus' story too.

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[34] Roman comedy owed a debt to Carthage. Terence was from North Africa; Plautus, knew enough Punic (Phoenician) to write Hanno's Punic speech in *Poenulus* (*The Little Carthaginian*). See Gratwick (1971).

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