

VERGIL'S SECRET ART

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A warning, as wise as authoritative, has lately been issued. It is our duty, and our delight, to read Vergil. Accordingly, some of the closer examinations of his text, especially some recent arithmetical explorations in which his poetry is shewn to be organized according to exactly corresponding numbers of lines, are not merely tedious but worse: they remove Vergil farther from our poetic enjoyment, and reduce him to a field for statistics.

In face of this, it is clear what would be the worst thing to do. That would be to abandon Vergil the inspired, and inspiring, poet, and to hand his text over to computers. It would be better to ignore the more damaging results of research, and continue as before, reading, enjoying, profiting. But there exist other people, who will not all be content to ignore the less attractive discoveries, all the more because these discoveries are mainly true facts, and can hardly now be disproved. A third way is best, to try to fit the new facts into their place in the whole scheme of Vergil's art. They might thus be cut down to size. It might then be possible to live with them, without excessive distraction from the deeper appreciation of his poetry.

After all, Vergil's achievements and abilities are already recognized to be so vast and so multifarious that no single further discovery concerning his methods should make more than a moderate difference to the general estimate. After a little adjustment, tentative and perhaps not very successful, each new wonder can recede into the whole immense mystery of Vergil, leaving it as, or nearly as, it has always been. "It is a strange peculiarity of Vergil," wrote Macrobius, "that he is invulnerable to criticism and unaffected by praise."

Vergil planned deliberately. It is now well known that the supposed intentions of a poet are by no means the most important question to be asked about him, if not indeed the question which is, of all questions, the least worth asking. Certainly the wind of inspiration bloweth where it listeth. It blew for Vergil. Yet Vergil had his intentions, and his plans, and a method in his inspiration; and much of all this was Vergil's secret, unknown to other people.

His literary biography is known in outline, and is very fairly reliable, since Vergil's own friends collected at least some material about him which was handed on to his ancient commentators and biographers, and has so reached us.<sup>1</sup> There are gaps and uncertainties, especially about dates, but they are

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1. K. Büchner, P. Vergilius Maro, Der Dichter der Römer, Stuttgart, Druckenmüller, 1955, col.6-17.

not fatal. The information is, I think, ample to show that Vergil, whatever else he may have been, was a real poet, not a mere propagandist.

Modern methods can elicit enough internal evidence, even including style and feeling, to prove that Vergil's supposed early poems in the so-called Vergilian Appendix were not, except for perhaps three or four, written by Vergil.<sup>1</sup> Of these, one is the famous parody of Catullus IV, Catalapton X. Catullus had written a poem in praise of his yacht:

phaselus ille quem videtis hospites  
ait fuisse navium celerrimus

Vergil wrote a parody about the successful career of a mule-driver, "Sabinus", who actually became a consul:

Sabinus ille quem videtis, hospites  
ait fuisse mulio celerrimus

Vergil retained as many of the actual words of Catullus as he could, but changed the others to fit "Sabinus" the muleteer. He was already interested in fitting words together and solving verbal problems.<sup>2</sup> He began with humour, ingenuity, and a love of words. Another early poem, Catalepton V, almost certainly by Vergil, in which he says goodbye to the teachers of rhetoric because he is going to Naples to learn Epicurean science, shews the same propensities. The parody shews something else too. No one can certainly identify the muleteer who became a consul. Vergil already knew how to make his poetry ambiguous. He had begun to acquire what Keats called "negative capability".<sup>3</sup> "That is", wrote Keats, "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after facts and reason"; Coleridge, he thought, would "let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium (sic) of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge". W.B. Yeats went further: "The more a poet rids his verses of heterogeneous knowledge and irrelevant analysis, and purifies his mind with elaborate art, the more does the little ritual of the verse resemble the great ritual of Nature, and become mysterious and inscrutable. He (that is, the poet) becomes, as all the great mystics have believed, a vessel of the creative power of God."<sup>4</sup> These ideas fit Vergil well, at least to some extent. Clearly this "negative capability", especially when on a smaller scale, often depends on a dexterous use of single words.

Taken together, these two interests, verbal manipulation and "negative capability", now constitute an important part of Vergil's characteristic style, already discernible, even before he wrote the Eclogues.

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1. Ib. 41-160.

2. E.Fraenkel (Atti e Memorie della reale Accademia Virgiliana di Scienze, Lettere et Arti di Mantova, N.S. xix-xx, 1926-7, 217-27) well emphasizes the importance of the parody as an exercise for Vergil.

3. Rosamund E.Harding, An Anatomy of Inspiration, Heffer, Cambridge, 1946, p.71.

4. Ibid.

In his early years Vergil is said, no doubt truly, to have been interested in many subjects, as poets usually are, and including mathematics. He certainly had the good poet's ability to amass knowledge. His passionate love for his family, his home, the countryside of Italy near and far, and the old history of Roman glory, is not in doubt. He was soon planning his future poetry; and already he knew that he had to work his words hard, and make the reader do his part. At some time, but perhaps not quite yet, Vergil understood his own genius, and made his secret plans.

Presently he read the Greek pastoral poems of Theocritus and others. He was swept away by their music, as we are credibly told. From now on the music of words is so central to his art that it may even be paramount, and from now on Vergil's poetic method is determined. The purpose here is to try to see how Vergil can possibly have contrived so intricate an art as he did contrive. The Idylls and the Eclogues begin to shew Vergil's plan.

He was joining, of course, the world of the Greek Hellenistic poets, and their adherents the Latin "moderns", neoterici, who were producing free translations of Greek originals. Catullus freely translated Callimachus. Romans had been freely translating Greek poets for two hundred years. Free translation from the Greek can be found in Vergil. But so far as I know it is confined to small units of poetry, a line or two or less than a line, and is always part of a longer but not necessarily very long passage which is not merely a translation but much more than that.

The Idylls and the Eclogues provided Vergil with nearly all the main principles of his procedure, and started him on his characteristic coordination of hard thinking and inspiration. He now learnt, first, word-music, and then that balance of form in thought and expression which is central to pastoral poetry, in which characteristically one goatherd speaks or sings and another answers him. This addiction to balances pervades Vergil. He balances ideas, and, helped by Sallust, who was one of Vergil's more important teachers in the condensed use of Latin, carries the process so far that he regularly contrives to let two different and even contrasting meanings reside together in a single phrase or even a single word - as when he lets a word which he coined himself, "insomnia" (Aeneid IV 9), neuter plural, mean both sleeplessness, "insomnia" feminine singular, and dreams, "somnia", neuter plural. On the way to this extreme is the very important step taken when he did not translate Theocritus but blended two or more Idylls together. All the time he was helped by what he knew already, how to fit words together ingeniously, and also how to leave obscurities and ambiguities in his finished poetry. Surely all this, especially the care to avoid direct translation and to blend elements into something new, is based on conscious intention. It is deliberate policy. It seems also to be Vergil's own secret. Even Horace hardly understood it. He believed in putting words together ingeniously, "callida iunctura". But he thought that to mix different stories together was like blending Chian and Falernian wine together - something which perhaps some people could do, but not a practice to be recommended except in a last resort. Possibly Propertius might have understood: but he, like the others, presents a Sibyl who is a single, known, Sibyl, whereas Vergil makes his Sibyl a blend of several known Sibyls.<sup>1</sup>

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1. J.H. Waszink, Vergil and the Sibyl of Cumae, Mnemosyne, Ser. IV, 1, i, 1948, 43-58.

Vergil consciously realized that, as André Gide wrote, "The whole problem lies just in that - how to express the general by the particular - how to make the particular express the general"<sup>1</sup>.

Vergil would have agreed with Coleridge's well-known requirement. Coleridge said that "the secondary or poetic imagination dissolves in order to recreate". But Vergil seems generally to begin with an exact combination of not less than two existing elements. The death of Priam is a simple example. One old Greek epic said that Neoptolemus, or Pyrrhus, dragged Priam from the altar to kill him. Another said that he killed Priam actually on the altar. Vergil as usual made these sources modify each other. He kept "altar" and kept "drag". But he made Pyrrhus drag Priam to, not from, the altar, and kill him there. There is a yet greater horror, and Vergil was also enabled to gain other poetic effects by the change. Goethe is said to have maintained that a poet ought to accept as much as possible from his sources, and alter everything so accepted, but always with the slightest possible alterations. It is strange how modern poetic theory fits Vergil so much better than most of the ancient beliefs about poetry. Vergil was an inventor.

But there were still more suggestions in Greek pastoral poems which Vergil could use. There was allegory, not very much of it but enough to shew that in a pastoral poem a countryman, a goatherd or another, could be made to represent some real person, perhaps a living poet. Obviously this suited Vergil. But he did not abandon his "negative capability" and his ambiguity. That is why there is so little agreement among those who try to identify the characters in the Eclogues with real people, poets or politicians especially; it has even been argued with exact learning and much intellectual power that Galatea is Sextus Pompeius and Amaryllis Marcus Antonius.<sup>2</sup> There is always at least some ancient evidence on which these identifications can be based. It still seems most probable that, as Servius thought, Vergil does not use allegory, but only suggestions emerging from partial similarities, with no exact equivalences. Vergil may even have hoped that several different schemes of suggestion would "shimmer through" - E.K. Rand's brilliant phrase -, leaving the choice to the reader. Certainly Tityrus and his mission in the First Eclogue appear as a blend of two distinct characters in two different situations. This example is simple. Less simple is the Fourth Eclogue, itself a combination of two poems of different kinds, where two or more schemes for the ages of man (of which at least one, Hesiod's, is inverted) are combined, and where a great number of identifications for the baby are possible. Here "negative capability" is so powerfully used that it is actually legitimate to identify the baby as the Messiah: such, by nature and design, is Vergil's art. Had Vergil - in Yeats's words - "become a vessel of the creative power of God?"

Vergil's set plan of combination, especially condensed combination, and of ambiguity with "negative capability", runs all through his work on all scales. It appears in single words, in the Eclogues and after, as when "depellere", of lambs, is "wean" or "drive down" - whereas "drive up" would have been expected in the context - and "insere", might be either "plant" or "graft". Vergil regularly chose words for this very reason.

If characters in the Eclogues, though not strictly allegorical, can suggest

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1. I owe this quotation to Professor John H.J. Savage, Transactions of the American Philological Association xci, 1960, p.364, note 14.  
2. J.H.J. Savage, TAPA lxxxix, 1958, pp.151ff.; cf. ib., xci, 1960, pp.355ff.

real, living poets and politicians, and, quite legitimately, different people to different readers, there may still be much more to find in the Eclogues. They may be poems about poets and poetry. They can also be about human life and the wide world. It is gratifying to think, and likely enough, that the Sixth Eclogue is actually about the history of civilization and its phases.<sup>1</sup> There may be many simultaneous meanings in Vergil. And he certainly may have used even more technical methods of formal construction than had been discovered in his text before about a generation ago.

Patterns of structure in hexameter poetry, when a unitary passage of a certain number of lines is followed, immediately or after an interval, by another passage of exactly equal length, or of a proportionate length according to a fixed formula of proportion, were not invented by Vergil. They are not unknown in Homer, Apollonius Rhodius, and Catullus. They are often associated, of course, with "emboxing", when two passages of equal length about the same subject are separated by another passage about another subject, which may, itself too, be so divided. The practice is also recognized in Beowulf<sup>2</sup> and ancient Indian epic.<sup>3</sup> According to the most thorough examinations Vergil operated this method in the Eclogues very elaborately indeed.<sup>4</sup>

In deciding how long his paragraphs or line-blocks should be he certainly followed, often exactly but sometimes approximately, the "Golden Ratio", the ratio of 1:0.618. The application, that is, the exact numbers of the lines of course, varies: 13:8 (really 8.034) is frequent.

These balances by numbers of lines occur also in the Georgics and the Aeneid. They were first noticed in the First Georgics, where it was observed that the lines given to "Works" (Georgics I 43-203) are in "golden ratio" to the lines given to the "Days" (Georgics I 204-263).

There are also balances according to subject. Eight of the Eclogues stand in a returning symmetry about Eclogue V, which is itself outside the scheme, and is paired with Eclogue X; V is about a shepherd who has become a god and X about a friend who has become a shepherd: meanwhile, I and IX are about country life and the confiscation of a farm, II and VIII about love, III and VII about music and a singing match, IV and VI about important religious and philosophical subjects, IV being about the future and VI about the past. There are other schemes: for example, I, II and III correspond in subject to VII, VIII and IX respectively; all these are realistic, contrasting with IV, V and VI which are about gods and contain fantasy; and X, sharing the characteristics of all, reconciles the central group with the other two.

The Georgics have similar balances: I and III end gloomily, II and IV hopefully; the messages they give are I War II Peace III Death and IV Resurrection. Georgics I and II are about the less animated growths of vegetation, and

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1. Colin Hardie, Eclogue VI (V.S. Lecture Summaries, No.50).
  2. I wish to thank Mr.E.A.Slade for this information.
  3. I wish to thank Professor R. Murray Smith for this information.
  4. George E.Duckworth, Mathematical Symmetry in Vergil, TAPA xci, 1961, 185-220, with references. J.Perret, Virgil l'homme et l'oeuvre, Paris, Boivin, 1952, 14-29; 59-71, with references.

III and IV about the more animated creatures, the animals, birds and insects. Georgics I and II have long prefaces, III and IV short; I 231-253 give the geography of the sky and III 339-383 give the geography of Libya and Scythia; I 125-146 describes the labour of a farmer and IV 125-146 the labour of an old gardener; and I 2 and IV 2 mention Maecenas, and so do II 41 and III 41.

In the Georgics, then, some symmetries and balances have been firmly identified. Sometimes the track vanishes, as if there may well be more to find, when the right place to look is discovered. The Aeneid, naturally, has still more possibilities. It is being well explored, and results are already far-reaching, but it is too soon to write shortly about them. Nor is it prudent to write shortly about the now famous identification of themes and their resumptions in the Aeneid.<sup>1</sup>

Balance and symmetry belong to the arts. In some works, and most obviously in large musical works, there is a vast and various mathematical structure. In large poetic works a comparable structure should not cause surprise. It is present in T.S.Eliot's Four Quartets. But in poetry the underlying mathematics are harder to detect. They can yet contribute to aesthetic effect, even on readers unaware of them. Vergil especially, as Yeats advised, "purified his mind with elaborate art".

Such elaborate art must certainly involve conscious planning and calculation. Vergil positively decided to blend his sources, on a large scale and on a small, down to the scale of single words and even parts of words. He decided to condense his language down to an explosive compression. He deliberately adjusted his poetry to permit obscurities and ambiguities, leaving his readers to furnish themselves with precise meanings; and some of them were so expressive, and seemed so concrete, that they have been explained as allegorical. Further, Vergil planned his poems to allow an exactly balancing number of lines for unitary passages, arranging the answering line-groups in complex variety. He also had regard to the position of the word-accent in his lines, especially in the fourth foot of each hexameter, a technique apparently harmonizing with the general scheme for lines in numerical equivalence or other fixed proportion. He arranged poems and books to stand in a sequence patterned according to subjects, or themes, balancing and contrasting.

In all this patterning there seems little room, so far, for anything besides the method of conscious head-work, despised by Goethe and not admitted as even a possible method for true poetry by Plato in the *Ion*, total inspiration being essential. Ennius was more Platonic: he notoriously owed his poetry to sleep, and drink, obviously his way to inspiration. Poets certainly differ in their methods. But meanwhile Vergil, strange though it may be to recall in this context, is especially famous for the inspired kind of poetic creation. He "stepped into the stream of rhythm and harmony" as Plato would have wished. The dominance of his "auditory imagination" has been elaborately established. Even the highly patterned Eclogues grew from a passionate love for the word-music of Greek pastoral, enjoyed, no doubt, in what Schiller called "a musical mood", the first stage of oncoming inspiration for him. There are signs of this kind of mood in the many oddities of language in the Eclogues, where Vergil seems to have been too dreamy even for grammar or at least correct Latin.

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1. V.Pöschl, Die Dichtkunst Virgils, Innsbruck & Vienna, Rohrer, 1950.

Schiller's second phase of inspiration is a vision of "picture-sparks". Perhaps they too intervened before Vergil returned to the highly rational adjustments which his poetry, especially, needed.

It is recorded that when he was writing the Georgics he used to deliver every morning "a great number of lines", and spend the rest of the day "licking them into shape", till he was left with a few, highly polished. In this he was perhaps like Milton, who also dictated poetry in the morning, having on the previous evening read some "choice poets", either for recreation or "to store his fancy against the morning", as his nephew, John Phillips, records.

That Vergil, like Coleridge and many more, composed poetry in "the deep well of unconscious cerebration" by the recombination of "hooked atoms of thought" has been argued persuasively. Some of his poetry came out, like Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, without "going through" his "head at all", to use Noel Essex's description of her own poetic process. The problem was not how to create the poetry, but how to draw out into consciousness poetry already made but still in the unconscious mind. This is exactly the theme of the famous anecdote about the half-line "Misenum Aeoliden" (*Aeneid* VI 164) and how Vergil completed it with two successive flashes of insight while his secretary was reading the book to him. Vergil, surely, was like Coleridge, Milton, and also Ennius, but without the drink. He had no lack of sheer inspiration, if that is a fair term for poetry made by "the secondary imagination" "dissolving and recreating" material existing in the unconscious mind.

Vergil himself understood his own imagination, and applied conscious thought to his unconscious mental processes. That was an important part of his secret. His composition was, therefore, in stages. He first observed, and read. Secondly, he allowed his unconscious mind to work on its store of material. Thirdly, he dictated and corrected the poetry which came into his consciousness. The problem is to discover which parts of the work were done at each of the stages.

When Vergil was writing the *Aeneid*, he first prepared a prose version. Racine wrote a prose version of at least one of his plays. Alfieri regularly wrote a prose version: his stages were "ideare, stendere, verseggiare".<sup>1</sup> For his other works Vergil may or may not have first written prose: perhaps he wrote a little prose, sometimes, as W.B. Yeats did; and perhaps he kept long notes, from the books he read. Some operations clearly belong to a prose version or notes. Among them is the deliberate plan which Vergil made for the *Aeneid*. It was to be "a structure of great and heterogeneous complexity, including both Greek and Roman names and subjects, and designed to express both the legendary facts of early history and also the history of Augustus and his family". Vergil was now to operate, on a very large scale, exactly the same principles of combination, compression and multiple significance on which he had decided when writing the *Eclogues*. The whole scheme of the *Aeneid* works on the same principle as Vergil's invented word "insomnia". And it must have been consciously devised, often with the help of prose.

However, there are signs of versified preliminary work in the *Georgics*, where some passages (*Georgics* II 346-50, 350-53) appear to be short indications

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1. I wish to thank Dr. P. J. Yarrow for this information.

of longer passages in Theophrastus.<sup>1</sup> Each is a kind of heading. Vergil intended to expand these headings, so covering in his own way the material in Theophrastus. This material had probably been consigned to the unconscious mind for dissolution and recreation. If these observations are correct, they suggest that Vergil sometimes wrote preliminary notes in verse.

On the whole Vergil seems to have planned all his outlines and at least his larger structures in a mood of conscious thinking. There was so much of this to do that he may have found the task of fixing exactly corresponding numbers of lines for balanced passages only one more task, and a task to him not unbearably arduous. He is already known to have matched lines with lines and passages with passages by his distribution of word accent, in coincidence with metrical ictus, in the fourth foot of his verse, "fourth-foot homodyne".<sup>2</sup> And now this patterning apparently harmonizes with the patterning by numbers of lines, a later discovery. The accentual symmetries had seemed spontaneous and unconscious. They now appear to be more conscious work, though no doubt liable, as is all conscious work, to sudden assistance from the unconscious. Here there are examples of a technique which must have been deliberate, and of another too, which, apart from this separate evidence, might have been spontaneous and not consciously willed.

How Vergil planned the Aeneid, and composed it by the careful direction of his own exceptional powers, is a problem both complex and subtle. He may have made elaborate notes with long extracts from books read, and the prose draft may have been long and full. Many lines may have been contrived by ingenious jigsaw-manipulation. Many delicate meanings may have been calculated thoughtfully. But the greatest passages do not look like this. They are surely discharged in a stream of inspiration. Quite evidently the sources are forgotten, and it is a re-creation, based on elements from them, which is present. They are sensuous, not intellectual; they are determined not by thought but by sound, and dominated by Vergil's "auditory imagination". Vergil knew that they would be, and prepared.

The more his preparation is understood, the more astounding it is. For his Dido, he may well have copied out earlier poetry concerning Ajax, Ariadne, Heracles, Medea, Nausicaa and even Dido herself, next learnt it by heart, and then slept on it, allowing his unconscious mind to dissolve the material and re-create it in a new combination, now becoming great poetry, and indeed depth poetry. This he may have dictated, after sleep, on each next morning, and then corrected. He must have known that Ennius drew his poetry from sleep, as Keats, very explicitly, did. General experience, however, suggests that more time is needed for gestation. Between the collection of the material and the dictation of the poetry five, ten or more years may normally have elapsed. But reading, on the evening before composition, could still be valuable for "working up" - Blake's phrase - "the vision".

The sources for Dido converge on Dido. This is normal. So is divergence. Sources are dislocated and dissolved; and their elements are redistributed. Convergence and divergence are complementary. Thus Vergil, most consciously aware of the law which he had created and accepted, broke up the Cassandra of the old Greek epic. He transferred elements from her to Laocoon, to Dido, to the

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1. I wish to thank Mr.L.A.S. Jermyn for this suggestion: perhaps I may here express profound gratitude for his other kindnesses, especially his selfless service to the Virgil Society.

2. W.F.Jackson Knight, Accentual Symmetry in Vergil, Oxford, Blackwell, 1939 (re-issued 1950 and 1962).

Sibyl, to Helen in his sixth book, and to Amata. This is so tidy and economical that it looks deliberate. But dream-poetry, direct from the unconscious, can be tidy and economical too. Coleridge's Kubla Khan, certainly produced in sleep, is very tidy and economical, and very much compressed also.

Here and elsewhere a certain dream-association, or some sense of allure-ment linking memories together, some mysterious poetic attraction, perhaps, may have exercised an appeal at a very early stage in the process.<sup>1</sup> There is an astonishing example in some place-names intricately used by Vergil in his account of the beginning of the war in Latium. Two Latin heroes are killed, Almo and Galaesus (Aeneid VII 531-9). Both were at first rivers, the Almo near Rome and connected with Cybele, and the Galaesus flowing into the gulf of Tarentum, a place which interested Vergil when writing the Georgics. Soon after Vergil mentions another hero, also on the side of the Latins, Oebalus, son of Sebethis, nymph of the small river Sebethus which flows into the sea near Naples (Aeneid VII 733-6). Oebalus was also the name of a Spartan king, said to have been the founder of Tarentum, called by Vergil "Oebalian" in the Georgics, just before the mention of the river Galaesus there (Georgics IV 125-9).

The proposal is that Vergil associated these names together, perhaps quite early in his career. He had certainly seen all the three rivers before he wrote the Aeneid. At some unknown time a reason for the artistic association of the names occurred to Vergil. All the three localities were important in the Second Punic War, and associated with Hannibal. So Vergil, in recounting the war between Aeneas and the Latins, contrived to suggest also allusions to the Second Punic War, the war with Hannibal.

Now the Spartan King Oebalus was the father of Tyndareus by a water-nymph Bateia. Tyndareus was father of Helen. Bateia was also the name of Teucer's daughter. Teucer was a king of Troy, and by his daughter Bateia, whom Dardanus married, became the ancestor both of Paris and Aeneas, so helping Vergil to make the war in Italy fought by Aeneas parallel not only to the Second Punic War but also to the Trojan War itself. It is a kind of literary counterpoint.

Such is a small, uncertain, glimpse of an astonishing part of Vergil's secret art. He let his very complex structure arise not mechanically but organically. At certain stages there are unconscious associations, offering possibilities. These possibilities Vergil pursued with a keen sense of the relevant and an economy which forgot nothing. The result is like the veins on a leaf, but to say this is superficial, for the comparison needs many leaves, interpenetrating.

Meanwhile the movement is also a chain-reaction. Teucer's Bateia is the Myrine whose tomb was outside Troy; in Homer Aeneas leads Trojan forces past it on one side and Ascanius leads Phrygian forces past it on the other side (Homer, Iliad ii, 811-815, 819-821, 826-863). Vergil calls the place an ancient mound of Ceres, and it is used not for dividing a marching army but as a meeting-point for the refugees escaping from Troy (Aeneid II 713-6). The

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1. The following paragraphs are based on Robert W. Cruttwell, Virgil's Mind at Work, Oxford, Blackwell, 1946.

smaller technique of variation continues. The genealogies are of course continually exploited. Aeneas arrived at the mound with his Penates, and Vergil calls them here "Teucrican Penates". Now Dardanus had a brother Iasus, Iasius, or Iasion. Both were born at Cortona in Italy. Dardanus married Bateaia at Troy. Iasius lay with Demeter-Ceres "in a furrow", according to some authorities in Crete. Their son was Plutus, "Wealth". Now Dionysius of Halicarnassus has a story that certain gods appeared to Aeneas in Italy, encouraging him. Vergil transferred the incident to Crete, where the Trojans landed by mistake. And he linked it with the tradition of Iasius. He combined the obscure gods who appeared to Aeneas in Italy with the Plutus who was the son of Iasius and Demeter-Ceres, and neatly turned them into the Penates, Teucrican and Roman. They speak to Aeneas, telling him to go to Italy, birthplace of Dardanus and their own father, Iasius (Aeneid III 147-171). The Aeneid grows like an oak from an acorn, according to the intricate and peremptory laws of its growth.

It is recorded that when Vergil could not solve a problem and create a good line he would write a temporary line, a "pitprop", "so that nothing might delay the onrush" of the poetry. Clearly, then, Vergil produced poetry in a spontaneous, rapid stream. The Romans used to ask whether poets were born or made, whether poets wrote "by nature" or "by skill", "poeta nascitur an fit?", "natura scribit (poeta) an arte?" Vergil characteristically reconciled the two functions, and directed his own inspiration. He was not content with the precepts of either Plato or Horace alone, or the practice of either Ennius or Catullus. He used both.

Longinus called Theocritus "the most felicitous of poets". Vergil could equal him in felicity but not all the time. His method of intense compression of meaning involved risk. Some years ago a distinguished scholar argued that Ovid's clear and precise poetry is the right sort, but Vergil's is the wrong sort, being less precise in outline and sometimes obscure. It is more likely that Vergil was simply doing something harder, and succeeding nearly always, but not quite always. He was not, as Longinus called Apollonius Rhodius, "dead safe". Longinus adds "But who would not rather be Homer?" We could add, "Or Vergil?"

Vergil's ardour for compression - "ut verba in compendium cogeret" says Servius - evoked the strictures of Gellius, or his character, the redoubtable Favorinus. To describe Etna, Vergil (Aeneid III 570-577) used Pindar's description (Pythian I 40-50), and, according to the accusation, made nonsense of it. Vergil, though famed for his incomparable elegance - this is conceded - has left many unpolished lines which are quite unworthy of him. The lines on Etna, says Favorinus, are the worst of all. Indeed, Vergil has hardly even begun to compose them. Pindar is luxuriant enough; Vergil is unbearably inflated. Pindar at least keeps to fact, and says that Etna emits smoke in the day-time and flames at night. But Vergil, being too busy looking for words noisy enough to satisfy him - a blow for "auditory imagination" - positively confused day and night together. Pindar's snake-like streams of lava are correct. Vergil's "black cloud smoking with a cyclone of pitch and white-hot ash" is just not in the scheme of things. What is white-hot cannot smoke, neither can it be black. Favorinus thinks that the best defence would be to accuse Vergil of a vulgar error in supposing "white-hot" to mean no more than "hot". When we come to

Vergil's "stones and rocks hoisted aloft", and then "melting, groaning, and crowding together in the sky", our experience as readers is infinitely more fantastic than any that the Trojans could have undergone on the spot. Gellius - or Favorinus - is very stern.

From a modern standpoint Vergil is easily defended. He was inventing a new kind of poetry, with richer meanings, closer reasoning, the effects of atmosphere, and a certain surrealistic impact. Ways are opened to metaphor, ambiguity, and "negative capability". Vergil behaved like Picasso, when Picasso shews together two things which in nature cannot be seen together, or develops Velasquez' portrait of Philip II to make his own version. Vergil of course did not copy Pindar. He used him to detonate his own imagination. As a painter, having seen an actual landscape, does not copy it but creates a poem in paint about the landscape which he has seen, so Vergil created his poetry partly as poetry about the poetry of the past. According to Goethe the best things in any work of art are what are taken over from tradition. Vergil found the right way to take them.

There is a view, held by Sir Joshua Reynolds, that artists must examine the great works of the past if they are to create good works themselves. Vergil made much use of earlier passages which are by no means great. He found many in Apollonius.

When Jason and Medea get married in a Cave of the Nymphs there is nothing mysterious.<sup>1</sup> Everything is clear and rational, a plain attractive narrative.

The comparison with Vergil is important:

speluncam Dido dux et Troianus eundem  
deveniunt. prima et Tellus et pronuba Iuno  
dant signum. fulsere ignes et conscius aether  
conubiis, summoque ulularunt vertice Nymphae

(Aeneid IV 165-8).

The Nymphs are obscurely remote: yet originally it was in their cave that the wedding took place. There is plenty more to notice, especially in what Vergil carefully does not say, and in his order of ideas. Several of Vergil's great and numinous passages make use of some very plain narratives in Apollonius.

Comparisons with Apollonius often illustrate Vergil's secret methods of thought and of choice. There are good examples in, and behind, the famous insomnia,

Anna soror, quae me suspensam insomnia terrent?

(Aeneid IV 9).

The complicated subtlety here was developed from some long, expansive expressions in Apollonius. After a description of all the rest of the world asleep (Argonautica III 744-50), Apollonius writes,<sup>2</sup> "In her yearning for Jason, fretful cares kept her (Medea) awake" (III 752). There is also: "Meanwhile the maiden lay on her bed, fast asleep, with all her cares forgotten. But not for long.

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1. For this comparison with Apollonius Rhodius I acknowledge the help of Mr. Preshous and his thesis on the subject, which I hope will be published soon. (J.D.M. Preshous, The Sources of Vergil's Aeneid with special reference to Apollonius Rhodius, Bristol University Thesis, 1960).

2. I gratefully use Dr. E.V. Rieu's Penguin Translation.

Dreams assailed her deceitful dreams, the nightmares of a soul in pain" (III 616-18). There is, too, Medea's speech on awakening: "Chalciope, I am terrified for your sons. I am afraid that Father will destroy them out of hand, strangers and all. I had a little sleep just now, and in a nightmare that is what I saw" (III 688-91). If Vergil's line is rightly translated and understood, he is seen to have expressed in five words many lines of Apollonius, and added, by his peculiar art, a suggestive mystery which allows the reader to imagine far more, even, than can be found in the prolix Apollonius.

A characteristic stroke of genius, in substituting a question for a statement, greatly helped. Besides the compression, that is, the convergence, there is as usual divergence. The thought "fast asleep with all her cares forgotten" (III 616 with 744-756) is transferred by Vergil to his picture of all the world, men and animals, asleep, but not Dido, and joined to a much altered version of the description in Apollonius of the sleeping world (Argonautica III 744-750: Aeneid IV 522-32). "Brevis esse laboro, obscurus fio" said Horace. Vergil, with his queer taste for paradox, discovered that he liked, and could use, obscurity. Medea in Apollonius could not keep her mind off Jason: "The whole scene was still before her eyes - how Jason looked, the clothes he wore, the things he said, the way he sat on his chair, and how he walked to the door. It seemed to her, as she reviewed these images, that there was nobody like Jason. His voice, and the honey-sweet words that he had used, still rang in her ears" (Argonautica III, 453-8). Vergil has

multa viri virtus animo multusque recursat  
gentis honos: haerent infixi pectore voltus  
verbaque nec placidam membris dat cura quietem.

(Aeneid IV 3-5)

and

quis novus hic nostris successit sedibus hospes,  
quem sese ore ferens, quam forti pectore et armis!

(Aeneid IV 10-11)

Again a question saves space and adds mystery. This time a great deal of Apollonius is suppressed: Vergil saw how prosaic all this literal detail was, and ignored it, as in the second Aeneid he reduced a long, dreary list of multifarious killing, which he found, apparently, in some old Greek poem on the sack of Troy, to

crudelis ubique  
luctus, ubique pavor, et plurima mortis imago

(Aeneid II 368-9).

These examples should be added to countless verbal usages, mainly metaphorical and resulting from combination and compression, such as "caeso sanguine", "blood from slain victims" (Aeneid XI 82), "tela exit", "avoids the weapons" (Aeneid V 438), and "occumbere morti", "meet death" (Aeneid II 62), a mixture of Ennius "morti occumbant obviam" (Enn. Sc. 135-6 Vahlen<sup>3</sup>) and "occumbunt multi letum ferroque lapique" (Enn. Ann. 395 Vahlen<sup>3</sup>).

Taken together, this material may be allowed to suggest how Vergil thought. He knew his own mind and his own laws for working. He read generally, and he read specifically. Particularly he read, for the poetry concerning Dido, the Argonautica of Apollonius. He or a secretary may have copied out many lines

of this poem as notes. Now the effect of the material from Apollonius is not only decorative; it is also structural. Therefore it must have been used already for Vergil's prose draft. It has been truly said that without Apollonius the Aeneid would have been entirely different.

It was mainly when Vergil turned his prose into verse that he effected his smaller combinations and compressions. Excision and abbreviation are characteristic of "head-work". Long gestation gave him a stream of verse each morning. Unconscious cerebration and memory had already adapted the source-material to fit - approximately - the new story, or the new form of the story. But compression, explosive power, and "elegance", as Gellius would say, were not perfect. It was principally while "licking his rough lines into shape" that the omissions, the abbreviations, and the compression were achieved, as Vergil said the lines over, aloud, to see what would come.

He always liked compression. But it is now known that he was subject to a further influence, which could have enforced it - the need to organize the parts of his work by "the golden ratio" in the number of their lines. Perhaps even this heavy additional burden was, to Vergil's enormous intellectual power, tolerable enough. To us, if it helped him to perfect his incomparably thoughtful style, it is a blessing.

There exists a very good short edition of the Fourth Aeneid with a commentary which almost or quite ignores the relation of Vergil to Apollonius. Certainly, Vergil had to depend on sources. But a reader may well ignore his dependence on them and treat other matters as so important that the interest of smaller-scale technique fades. The Dido whom Vergil created with such immense toil is eloquent, however little that toil is remembered. Like Allecto, Dido carries profound meaning for the nature and history of mankind.

Dido is a Graeco-Roman heroine, but still more she is, and had been, a Phoenician goddess, Anat-Elishat, her two names providing both Dido's other name Elissa and the name of Dido's sister, Anna.<sup>1</sup> Now in early times goddesses, not gods, had been dominant in Mediterranean lands. But, through the arrival of migrating peoples of Indo-European speech, gods everywhere prevailed over goddesses - everywhere except at Carthage. Carthage, therefore, represents an older order. It is supported by Juno the Roman goddess who is especially a goddess of women. Against Carthage and against Juno Rome and the Roman Jupiter must prevail.

There is surely some truth in the view advanced by Erich Neumann that rituals of initiation have as part of their intention the purpose of enlivening the progressive, masculine element in societies and preventing this from relapsing into a more static condition, the matrix of the feminine.<sup>2</sup> If such was the purpose, that is sufficient here. The purpose need not have been well conceived. Perhaps the feminine element is unjustly maligned as an influence for mere stability. Socrates thought it the source of prophecy. But the symbol existed; and is mightily used by Vergil. Rome has to go forward, and "pass the whole earth under laws",

totum sub leges mitteret orbem (Aeneid I 231)

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1. E. Paratore, Nuove interpretazioni del Mito di Didone, Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni, xxvi, 1955, 71-82; cf. G.C. Picard, Les religions de l'Afrique antique, Paris 1954, 26-55.
  2. E. Neumann, The Origins and History of Consciousness, Pantheon Books, New York, 1954, pp. 126, 140ff., etc.

Instinct and passion are not enough; clear judgment and will and cerebral control must lead. Vergil could have told the story without Dido. Others did. Or he might, with others again, have made Dido a heroine not of passion but of self-sacrifice. But he preferred to serve the deepest truth. Even then, the end is in, not victory, but reconciliation.

Perhaps we cannot see very clearly into the secrets of Vergil, his lonely art, which made him unique, the one and only Vergil whose power reaches always farther, and always, however his readers and their times may differ, prevails. The result of elaborate effort is often a simple enjoyment. There is a good poem, not pretentious, not often quoted, but well worth quoting, by Hal Summers, entitled Epitaph on a Schoolmaster:

It is an old schoolmaster  
Who ruled when we were young,  
Rolling the heavy-ended Latin  
Along his iron tongue.

From him the grammar came as smooth  
As a ploughshare in the clay,  
In the little farm of learning  
He tilled, day after day.

But there were certain flowers he passed  
Which seemed for ever new:  
Virgil, honour this ghost;  
He honoured you.

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I am deeply grateful to the Council, Officers and Members of the Virgil Society for their great kindness to me and the honour they confer in inviting, and now publishing, this lecture.