

Saltem si qua mihi de te suscepta fuisset
ante fugam suboles, si quis mihi parvulus aula
luderet Aeneas, qui te tamen ore referret,
non equidem omnino capta ac deserta viderer.

The explanation, says Drew, is simple: Sidonia Dido is obviously Scribonia; now Scribonia, as is well known, was divorced by Augustus immediately after their daughter Julia was born. Unfortunately Augustus had wanted a son, and if Julia had been a boy history might have taken a different course just as surely as if Cleopatra's nose had been a bit longer: Augustus might never have divorced Scribonia if only a little Augustus had been playing in the courtyard.

On such threads of gossamer are allegorical theories woven.

THE SHIELD OF AENEAS

Some Elementary Notions ¹

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Much ingenuity has been spent on attempts to interpret Virgil's description of the shield of Aeneas (VIII.625-731), but so far not with much success. This lack of success seems to have been largely due to the neglect of certain elementary facts. Perhaps by drawing attention to these facts and their implications I may help to clear the ground.

It is hardly necessary to recall that, whereas the scenes on the shield of Achilles (Iliad XVIII.478-608) are taken from life in peace and war, those on Aeneas' shield concern the history of Rome. Seven scenes are briefly described: 1. The suckling of Romulus and Remus by the she-wolf (630-634); 2. The rape of the Sabine women followed by the making of a treaty between Romans and Sabines (635-641); 3. The punishment of Mettus Fufetius for his treachery (642-645); 4. Porsenna, Horatius Cocles, Cloelia (646-651); 5. Manlius, thanks to the sacred geese, defending the Capitol from the Gauls (652-662); 6. The dance of the Salii, the Lupercalia and other ceremonies (663-666); 7. The Underworld, with Catiline in Tartarus and Cato in Elysium (666-670). These seven scenes take up 41 lines. Four more lines describing the sea with dolphins swimming in it (671-674) provide the setting for an eighth scene (675-728) of 54 lines, longer than all the rest put together - Actium, followed by the triumph of Augustus.

This is a somewhat miscellaneous collection of subjects, and scholars have tried to comfort themselves and us by finding either one unifying theme or a pattern of several themes. Warde Fowler attempts the former. In his commentary on Book VIII (Aeneas at the Site of Rome, Oxford, 1917, pp. 103 ff.), he maintains that we have here scenes 'of escapes from terrible perils, both moral and material, ending with the Battle of Actium, the most wonderful escape of all'. But, as he himself admits, the sixth scene, depicting the dance of the Salii and other ceremonies, does not fit into his scheme, and he can explain its presence only by suggesting that Virgil included it at the request of Augustus (op.cit., p.107). Miss J.R. Bacon, in her article 'Aeneas in Wonderland' (Classical Review liii (1939), pp.97-104), recognizes this difficulty and also others, for example that the theme of narrow escapes accounts 'only by some stretch of the imagination for the Sabines' (p.102). One might say that this is equally true of the Mettus passage. Just as Virgil omits the perils that preceded the treaty with the Sabines, so too he omits the dangerous situation that provoked Tullus to punish Mettus so savagely. Miss Bacon introduces another element, an important one: It is that the scenes 'are, except for Actium, narrow escapes on the site that Aeneas has just seen' (l.c.).

Except also for the Mettus scene (Livy I.27.4 and I.28), one should add. And again, what of the Salii scene? It takes place in Rome, but where is the escape from danger? Perhaps it would have been better to discard the narrow escapes.

Brooks Otis, in his recent book Virgil, a Study in Civilized Poetry, tries to be more comprehensive. He speaks (p.341) of 'the main theme which is the constant opposition of virtus, consilium and pietas to the forces of violence in all Roman history'. Where does the she-wolf display these qualities? If Livy (I.4) is right, she was the kindly but unknowing instrument of destiny, and one wonders if Virgil implies any more, if as much. And again the Salii raise their ugly heads. Their scene may represent pietas, but if so, it is pietas in a vacuum, opposed to nothing. Brooks Otis sums up (p.342): 'Everywhere violence is defeated, evil is punished, religio is observed.' It might be truer to say: 'Everywhere either violence is defeated, or else evil is punished, or else religio is observed.' But in this case, we are still left with a miscellany.

Warde Fowler and Brooks Otis try to find a unifying theme. On the other hand, W.L. Drew (The Allegory of the Aeneid, Oxford, 1927, pp. 26-31) applies a slightly different method in an attempt to discover a pattern of themes. He gathers the seven early scenes on the shield into four groups, each of which is supposed to exemplify one of the four Augustan virtues, uirtus, clementia, iustitia, pietas. Thus: (a) From the she-wolf (1) the twins imbibe uirtus (Virgil, however, makes her attend to less lofty needs);

(b) The Sabine Women and the treaty (2) exemplify clementia (but would not something like prudentia and the willingness to accept a peaceful solution occur more readily to anyone who did not know the key?);

(c) The punishment of Mettus (3) and Porsenna, Cocles, Cloelia (4) stand for iustitia. (This might suit the punishment of Mettus, but even here one would be more inclined to think of respect for fides and detestation of those who violate it. As for the Porsenna scene, love of independence (libertas, 648), hatred of tyranny, and audacious courage more readily occur to one, and there are no doubt other possibilities);

(d) Manlius and the sacred geese (5), the Salii, etc. (6) and Tartarus and Elysium (7) all illustrate pietas. (This is more convincing than the other suggestions, even though Virgil seems to separate (6) and (7) with his phrase hinc procul addit (666), which Drew desperately attempts to explain away: I shall return to this phrase later. But does (5) merely exemplify pietas? Could one not also see in it good fortune or providence? And does not (6) imply pietas? Does not (7) symbolize pietas much less forcibly than the ultimate triumph of good (Cato) over evil (Catiline) in the state?).

My purpose in discussing Drew's scheme was not to pick holes, but to show how difficult it is to be certain what moral is to be drawn from each of the scenes if one looks at them with an open mind. In most cases several possibilities are by no means excluded. Any attempt to impose a pattern of themes is likely to encounter difficulties no less serious than those which we have noticed in attempts to discover a unity of theme.

Until one or other of these methods justifies itself, we must suppose that both are defective; and there is nothing to be lost by starting again and looking for quite a different principle of design.

If we go back to the beginning of the passage, we find that Vulcan had depicted on the shield 'Italian history and the triumphs of Rome' (res Italas Romanorumque triumphos, 626), 'the whole descent of the stock to be, starting with (or "sprung from") Ascanius, and wars fought one after another' (genus omne futurae/stirpis ab Ascanio, pugnataque in ordine bella, 628-9), that is, all pre-Roman history from Ascanius onwards, and at least all the main military events of

Roman history too. Needless to say, it is a truly miraculous shield, comparable with Turnus' fire-breathing helmet (VII. 785-88).

This, then, according to Virgil himself, is what is on the shield, all of Rome's prehistory starting with Ascanius and at least all her major wars up to his own time; and we must not forget what he tells us. It is paying him scant respect and doing him little service to proceed as if there were nothing on the shield other than the scenes he has chosen to describe.

Now all the pictures on the shield of Achilles are described in 126 lines. This passage sets the scale for Virgil, and possibly reduces it somewhat, the Aeneid being a shorter poem than the Iliad and presumably having been planned as such. How was Virgil to reproduce his vast subject in no more than 126 lines? This was his main problem. Of course, it was impossible for him to do so completely. Virgil himself implies as much if non enarrabile ('not to be described in full') in the phrase clinet non enarrabile textum (625) is something more than a bare reminiscence of ὄ τι φατερός (Hesiod, Scutum 144, 161) and ὄ φατός (ibid. 230); and it should be something more if Virgil is writing here with Virgilian economy. However, instead of attempting the impossible, Virgil attempts what is practicable, and in his hands successful, although by no means simple.

After announcing the great theme (626-29), he jumps from Ascanius to Romulus, omitting the Alban period, which is sketched in Book VI (760-776). Then he sets out to create the impression that he is portraying the whole of Rome's history. This is his primary aim. Five historical scenes take us rapidly from Romulus as a baby to 390 B.C. But they are not supposed to be the only scenes from this period on the shield. Virgil hints at this when after the she-wolf scene he says that 'not far from this' (nec procul hinc, 635) was the scene of the Sabine women. 'Not far' must mean that there were some intervening scenes, though probably not many, if only because the lapse of time was not great. Similarly, haud procul inde (642) suggests that there were some scenes left undescribed between the treaty with the Sabines and the punishment of Mettus. Numa was here, but exhibited because Virgil wanted to introduce religious rites at a different point, as we shall see.

Just five scenes are selected from the whole so as to serve as chronological landmarks registering the lapse of time from the childhood of Romulus down to 390 B.C. Therefore the main principle of selection in this part of the portrayal was nothing more sophisticated than chronological succession. Incidentally, of course, it was desirable that the scenes chosen should make sense as plastic art. Or that at any rate some of them should. It may be doubted whether Virgil's visual realization of the artefact was complete when he made darkness protect the Gauls (658) or caused the bushes to be bespattered with blood from the two halves of Mettus' body (642-45). Incidentally, but again perhaps only incidentally, it was desirable that the scenes should be in various ways as dramatic as they are brief.

But as Virgil reaches 390 B.C., space, however sparingly used, is being used up. There are still centuries to go, and the grand climax is still to come, a climax which, in view of its importance for the poem as a whole, requires and indeed deserves at least as much space as is given to all the rest of the scenes put together.

This is where Virgil plays a weak hand like the master that he is. From the suckling of Romulus to the geese on the Capitol (630-56) time appears to move very quickly. Virgil, however, proceeds to develop the Capitol in a fuller and more leisurely way than any of the others that precede it. The tempo slows as the Gauls stealthily approach (657-58), and finally there is no movement from them at all (659-62). It is as if time were beginning to stand still. In the next scene (663-666), which on the shield is the design adjacent to the Gauls (hic, 663), time is

standing still. The dances of the Salii and the other religious activities are timeless. The scene that follows, that of the Underworld (666-70), begins also by being timeless, but almost immediately confronts us with two figures who had existed very much in time, Catiline first and then the younger Cato², the one now in Tartarus, the other now in Elysium. Thus, almost before we are conscious of the fact, time has proved to have moved on, transporting us in a flash to the Catilinarian conspiracy of 63-62 B.C. and beyond, for Cato lived until 46 B.C. Now Virgil is within sight of his goal, 31 B.C. and the following years, with plenty of space still left in which to present his final scene.

We may complain that Virgil has taken us by surprise. And so he has, but not without giving us a warning. After the picture of religious ceremonies, he introduces the Underworld with the phrase hinc procul addit ('Far from here...', 666), a sure indication that the next historical landmark will be far ahead in time, presumably with many undescribed scenes intervening. It is in one of these that we must look (in vain) for Hannibal, whose absence from Virgil's account so greatly surprises Warde Fowler (op.cit., pp.107-8) and Miss Bacon (op.cit., p.102).

The adoption of a chronological scheme with a tight schedule still left Virgil with some freedom in the choice of his scenes, and it may yet be possible for some scholar to prove that within the dominating scheme the scenes were selected to illustrate a theme or group of themes. Until this is done, however, it might be best merely to say that Virgil has chosen scenes that are creditable to Rome and flatter Roman pride. This, however, amounts to a truism; and it does so, I suspect, because Virgil's overriding aim was quite different. This is not to deny that he shows a characteristic sense of fitness in deciding to restrict himself to early episodes in Roman history for his preliminary scenes. Their primitive colouring and usually their occurrence in Rome itself serve to link them to the prehistoric Rome of the earlier parts of the book. There are even echoes, some of them unmistakable. The Salii have already danced, at the festival of Hercules (285-88). As for the Luperci (667), their cave has been shown to Aeneas (343-44), and the hut of Romulus (654) may be intended partly to remind us of its forerunner, Evander's cottage.

I have tried to offer an analysis which would account satisfactorily for all the scenes that Virgil has included in his description of the shield, including the troublesome and apparently anomalous Salii scene. I have attempted to show that it is more appropriate to explain Virgil's composition of the earlier part of the episode in terms of movement rather than of content. In other words, the structure here is dynamic rather than thematic. The notions that have been pursued in this paper may seem naive. I do not think, however, that they make Virgil seem naive. On the contrary, they may help us to appreciate the skill and imagination that he has shown in his handling of a difficult problem. In describing the shield, he has succeeded in his aim of causing us to feel that we have traversed the whole of Roman history up to his own time as the successive scenes are displayed to us. This aim he has achieved by the manipulation and control of movement. To use a commonplace image, it is as if he had found a torrent and diverted it into a lake with a subterranean outlet from which his stream emerges many miles further one, within sight of its great estuary. This image, I think, is not inappropriate. The passage flows naturally. The artifice of the hand that controls its course and speed is all but concealed. The adroitness and the boldness of the composition all but escape notice.

NOTES

1. This is an expanded version of a 'communication' given to the Bristol Branch of the Classical Association on March 10th, 1967.
2. Servius thought that Virgil was referring to the elder Cato, but this is

unlikely for various reasons. See Conington's note ad loc. and Warde Fowler (op. cit., p.109). If I am right in thinking that historical events are here presented by Virgil in strictly chronological order, Cato here must be the younger Cato. Virgil could not refer first to Catiline, and then to the elder Cato.

VERGIL AND THE PRE-GREEK GODS

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W.F. Jackson Knight strikes the right note in the opening lines of the Aeneid 'Juno was ruthless and could not forget her anger' and therefore persistently thwarted Aeneas in carrying out his destined mission - a mission that formed the theme of Vergil's epic. And Knight well translates Vergil's own wondering comment on the legend, and that inevitably formed the framework of the Roman Epic, 'it is hard to believe Gods in Heaven capable of such rancour'. Like Euripides, Vergil accepted the traditional story but changed its meaning. Both poets adopted the Olympian gods established in tradition but criticised them in so far as they were gods made by man in his own image. Vergil's personal beliefs, I think, are found, though incompletely stated, in Aeneid VI. 723 ff.

It is sometimes forgotten that Vergil had a deep regard for those old national deities who had an individual existence in Italy before the Greek gods were equated, sometimes very roughly, with what seemed their Italian counterparts. Mars, for example, was largely concerned with agriculture, before he was given the rôle of Ares. These old Italian deities were regarded by the Romans as spiritual forces of an impersonal kind; this conception of God as spirit was perhaps nearer to Christian thought than the later anthropomorphic gods, as Cyril Bailey once remarked. Compare St. John IV.24: πνεῦμα ὁ Θεός God is Spirit; not a Spirit.

But the brilliantly imaginative representations of the Greek anthropomorphic gods held tremendous advantages for literature and proved irresistible to the artistic mind. Yet Vergil was a philosopher as well as a poet and had in fact in his youth contemplated devoting himself almost entirely to science and philosophy under the guidance of Siro; for I believe Catalepton V is genuinely Vergilian. As a philosopher and a humanist, he objected to the insults offered to Deity by the attribution of primitive human feelings. He criticised the low motives of Juno - which included the bribery of Aeolus - and her alliance with the hellish Fury Allecto (flectere si superos nequeo, Acheronta movebo) - an alliance that may be due to the interpretation of men, because in the end, Vergil's Juno is converted to the Trojan-Italian cause (Aen.XII, 818 ff.).

Now it is interesting to note that when Vergil is deeply moved, he appeals, not to the Greek gods, but to the ancient Italian concepts of the Divine. Such an occasion we find towards the end of Georgic I at a time when renewed clouds of civil war were threatening (about 46 B.C.) and the Roman world was compared, in a fine simile, to a chariot with which the horses had run away -
ut cum carceribus sese effudere quadrigae
addunt in spatia, et frustra retinacula tendens
fertur equis auriga (the agitated weak caesura)
neque audit currus habenas.

With all the anguish of those who had suffered the horrors of the Civil wars (impia bella) and had begun to hope that the new ruler could at last restore stability, Vergil prays that Octavian - hunc saltem invenem - may be spared, in spite of Rome's past guilt and present confusion, to perform this task. And what deities does he appeal to? (1) to the di patrii, the gods of the fatherland, the ancestral gods; (2) to the Indigetes, a term of which we do not know the details,