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Aeneas's Labyrinth and the Fall of Troy

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This paper explores the use of the Labyrinth image in Aeneid 2. It identifies the latent labyrinth image and proceeds to draw comparisons between the latent labyrinth in Aeneid 2 and the more explicit labyrinth of Aeneid 6. It then goes on to show how Vergil uses this image and its implications to efface his own narrative voice in Aeneid 2 and replaces it with Aeneas' own. Thus Aeneas has as much authority in the narrative as does the poet himself.

Aeneas remembers the fall of Troy in Book 2 of the *Aeneid*. Harmless as this statement might seem, there is more to it than might be noticed at first glance. Not only does Aeneas *remember* the fall of Troy, he does so from a couch. The psychoanalytic connotations of this image in our day are perhaps anachronistic, but they are not inappropriate. Aeneas' retelling of the fall of Troy is a form of therapy. Aeneas *re-members* the fall of Troy, that is, he rebuilds it, he creates. Vergil forces his readers to ask the question *Just whose poem* is Book 2? I argue that Book 2 is Aeneas' poem as much as it is Vergil's, and that Vergil himself signals this by building a particular image into the poem which speaks to the relationship between the artist and his creation. This image is the labyrinth. The labyrinth and its connotations undergird much of Book 2, but not explicitly. Yet there is no dearth of evidence for its existence. Furthermore, connections with the Daedalus doors in Book 6 (lines 14-33) will also support the underlying structure of the labyrinth image in Book 2. Finally, I will show how Vergil uses the labyrinth to efface his own presence and to share interpretive authority with Aeneas.

I

First, a technical detail should be taken care of in order to ensure a smooth and understandable argument. My argument owes much to an article written by Paul Allen Miller entitled: *The Minotaur*

within: Fire, the Labyrinth, and Strategies of Containment in Aeneid 5 and 6. Miller's analysis of Vergil's use of fire and the labyrinth as symbols for passion and the containment thereof has allowed me to draw many connections of my own to Book 2. While Miller sees the labyrinth symbol in a few passages in Book 5 and the famed Daedalus passage in Book 6, I expand the symbol and apply it to almost all of Book 2. I will begin by defining or at least denoting my expansion of the labyrinth motif. Thereafter I will proceed to show how Book 2 is as much Aeneas' own poem as it is the poet's.

Miller aligns the labyrinth with a Lacanian model. He begins by calling attention to the difference between Lacan's conception of "the symbolic" and "the imaginary", the symbolic referring to "the socially sanctioned realm of law and literature" (Miller 233) and the imaginary referring to "that initial coming to consciousness of the child that occurs before its wishes and desires are controlled and mediated by the social world around it" (Miller 233-234). Thus the "symbolic" is constructed consciousness and the "imaginary" is unconstructed or chaotic consciousness. Miller goes on to associate the symbolic with ancient conceptions of masculinity and the imaginary with ancient conceptions of femininity. This point bears only marginally on my argument. What is more important is that the symbolic can be seen as the frame of mind of an artist. From there it is not difficult to make the logical step of associating the symbolic with poetry in general.

Of the labyrinth itself Miller writes, "From this point of view, the labyrinth would be analogous to the symbolic itself, the social realm of language and ideology whose role is to subsume and contain the monsters of the imaginary. The labyrinth as the symbolic functions as a mechanism of repression, which makes a controlled, socially sanctioned desire possible." (Miller 234). Obviously this holds great relevance to the Daedalus passage in Book 6 since the labyrinth is a creation, which in turn speaks to the very nature of the *Aeneid* itself. In any case, it is clear that the labyrinth as a symbol is closely related to the suppression of monstrous desire.

But the labyrinth image is not just a symbol of repression. It is also a kind of underworld. Numerous scholars (William Fitzgerald, Michael Putnam, et al.) writing about connections between the story of Daedalus and Aeneas have compared the labyrinth with the underworld. Indeed, Brooks Otis states bluntly "It seems plain that the labyrinth in some sense symbolizes the underworld, the Kingdom of the Dead" (Otis 284). Both structures are underground, and both house monsters such as Cerberus or the Minotaur. Moreover both of them are extremely difficult to escape. As the sibyl tells Aeneas, the underworld is easy to enter, but to exit: "hoc opus, hic labor est" (6.129). The difficulty of escaping the labyrinth is shown by the fact that the only person who can solve it is the great artist himself. So the labyrinth is associated with the underworld and all that the underworld connotes. They are both places of darkness and danger. And they both bewilder and entrap hapless adventurers. The image of the labyrinth/underworld is essential because Aeneas recounts the fall of Troy with this image as the dominating figure.

II

Book 2 begins "Conticuere omnes intentique ora tenebant/ Inde toro pater Aeneas sic orsus ab alto" (2.1-2). Thus the first thing the reader/listener learns is that Aeneas is taking over the function of narrator. This substitution is immediate cause for suspicion. The narrator has an interest in casting himself in a good light with his story—thus he is on the defensive. As W.R. Johnson writes, "Vergil's narrator forces his surrogate narrator to reveal himself...He must tell more, reveal more, about his fears and hopes, than he wishes to reveal, lay bare the dark corners of his mind, where, unconsciously, his dreamwork has caused his fears and his self hatred to manifest themselves in the uncanny and recurrent symbols that various critics have detected in Book 2" (Johnson 53). Aeneas has an interest in presenting himself to Dido as one who was not a coward, but rather a hero in defeat. It is remarkable to the modern reader that he reaches deep within his own soul to remember the fall of his home city.

The first product of Aeneas' recital is his version of the wooden horse story. The horse itself is described in terms that make it seem as if the Trojan horse is a little labyrinth. From the beginning, it is clear that the Greeks *construct* the horse, making it symbolic. Then follows the description of its engorgement "delecta virum sortiti corpora furtim/ includunt caeco lateri penitusque cavernas/ ingentis uterumque armato milite complent" (2. 18-20). In his definition of the labyrinth, Miller says "It simultaneously holds within itself that which it is dangerous to let out, and keeps out those who would try to probe too deeply within and fall prey to monsters better left undisturbed" (Miller 234). The Greeks inside the horse are certainly too dangerous to let out, and they are simultaneously concealed and (despite Laocoon's virile projectile) shielded within. Furthermore the horse, like all symbols, requires interpretation. Sinon (once again, in spite of the ardent Laocoon) persuades the Trojans to accept *his* interpretation, which is of course (much like the hallways of a maze) misleading. And so it goes until the Trojans, wrapped up in the winding passages of Sinon's lies, bring the horse into the city. With each misinterpretation (e.g., Sinon, Laocoon's death) or error in judgement (the horse itself, the hesitation of the horse before it enters) they make, they enter further and further into the labyrinth symbolized by the interior of the horse.

When night falls, so does Troy—but the Labyrinth rises. Vergil writes "Vertitur interea caelum et ruit Oceano nox/ involvens umbra magna terramque polumque/ Myrmidonumque dolos; fusi per moenia Teucric/conticuere sopor fessos complectitur artus" (2. 250-254). Night rushes from the ocean, as do the Myrmidonic tricks, and sleep *embraces* their limbs. As R.G. Austin comments "Night seems almost to take a personal interest in the Greeks, whose craft she must conceal as she carries out her normal enveloping function" (Austin 117). The Trojans are enfolded in the labyrinth now. Bernard Knox has famously described the Trojan horse as a form of the serpent image, which "strikes from concealment, as the Greeks did from the horse" (Knox 380). But it's not just an ordinary concealment from which the Greeks strike. They strike at *night*. It is almost as if the darkness which masked the

Greeks inside the horse has now proceeded from the horse and hides them in the city as well. Indeed, Vergil writes “*Illos patefactus ad auras/reddidit equus laetique caverna robore promunt*” (2.259-260). Austin notes that “the dactylic rhythm and the faintness of the pause at the fourth-foot caesura...combine to give an effect of speed” (Austin 121), so that the Greeks seem to rush out of the horse, even as night rushes from the Ocean.. They emerge (lit: bring themselves forth) under the cover of the night, which will serve as their labyrinth.

Back in line 250 the heavens are literally turned. Now the labyrinth, the underground lair in which the serpent writhes, has turned over as well and has come forth among the buildings of Troy. This labyrinth/underworld both figuratively and literally appears in the form of dreams. During the fall of Troy Aeneas is visited by both Hector and Creusa. Hector is a ghastly vision, carrying wounds, his beard caked with blood and his feet swollen, having been pierced by leather bonds. As the Poet says “*Quantum mutatus ab illo / Hectore qui redit exuvias indutus Achilli/ vel Danaum Phrygios iaculatus puppibus ignis*”(2.274-276). And Aeneas describes Creusa's shade as “*nota maior imago*” (2.773). Hector is a dream and Creusa is some sort of shade, but both are evidence of the land of the dead seeping into the land of the living. And both of these episodes anticipate Aeneas' ascent from the underworld through the gate of false dreams.

Further evidence for the confusion and chaos of this labyrinthine underworld can be found in Aeneas' actions and his narration. When he is about to waken Aeneas narrates “*Diverso interea miscentur moenia luctu*” (2.298). It is noteworthy that the very walls are mixed in this sentence, for these mixed up walls seem to have an effect on Aeneas later, when he is trying to flee the city with his family and loses his wife. Why does a man who has lived all his life in a particular city all of a sudden forget the layout of the streets? Why does Aeneas, even with “*confusam...mentem*” (2.736) forget where he is in this crucial moment and leave behind Creusa? In any case it is striking that the city should become so bewildering (despite the presence of the Greeks and the fire) and that the lands he has

walked throughout his whole life would become an unknown maze. This new enigma of a city also takes advantage of Aeneas' "confusam mentem" in other ways. During the fighting he dons Greek armor to attack the Greeks. But in doing so he plays the very trick which the Greeks have played on the Trojans "Vadimus immixti Danais" (2.396). Thus Aeneas' own identity is confused, lost among the twists and turns of the "caecam...noctem" (2.397). Thus night, the labyrinth, and the underworld are intertwined in Book 2.

But it is not satisfactory simply to point to all the labyrinth images in the Book 2 alone, especially since Daedalus' labyrinth plays such a large role in the beginning of Book 6. Investigations of the connections between the Daedalus passage and Book 2 yield promising results. George Duckworth points out the connection between the even numbered books of the *Aeneid* during a summary of Vergil's various rhetorical structures, saying that Vergil stresses "The alternation of the books, those with even numbers being of a more serious and tragic nature than those with odd numbers, which are lighter and serve to relieve the tension" (Duckworth 186). Thus Books 2 and 6 are linked by their gravitas. But they are also linked by the labyrinth.

These connections reverberate across the poem, from the fall of Troy to the Daedalus doors, and serve not only to create cohesiveness within the poem, but also to make a point about the poem as a whole. Daedalus' doors are the key to understanding Vergil's message in Book 2 and therefore, a short exposition which holds Book 2 in mind is necessary.

The passage containing the episode with the doors is only about 19 lines long (6.14-33), yet it echoes throughout the poem, as related scholarship echoes throughout history. Eleanor Winsor Leach points out that the authority of interpretation is uncertain in this passage: "We can see how an absence of narrative preparation makes the location of interpretive authority uncertain" (Leach 118). The power of interpretation (which bad narrators so often abuse) is abdicated in the Daedalus passage, or at the very least, obscured. As the narrator in this passage abandons its authority, so too does Vergil's narrator

abandon its authority in Book 2 by making Aeneas himself the narrator. Furthermore Leach states that this kind of uncertainty “sets up a tension between seeing and interpretation that may apply to other moments of the journey conveyed by reported description” (Leach 120). So in both Book 2 and Book 6 the narrative (or interpretive) authority is in question.

There are many points of comparison between Aeneas and Daedalus. The passage in Book 6 begins thus, “Daedalus, ut fama est, fugiens Minoia regna/ praepetibus pennis ausus se credere caelo/insuetum” (6.14-16). Both Aeneas and Daedalus are fleeing. While Aeneas flees the wreck of Troy, Daedalus flees the ancient Minoans. Both Aeneas and Daedalus dare to trust themselves to heaven. Although Daedalus literally flies, Aeneas (perhaps despite himself) chooses to trust himself to heaven by doing heaven’s bidding. And finally, “insuetum” is a perfect adjective to describe Daedalus and Aeneas together since Aeneas must seek a completely new homeland and Daedalus sought to fly, which was obviously an innovation. Further comparisons can also be made. One of these is the element of reversal in both stories. In the Daedalus passage, the great inventor “enavit” (6.16) through the air and dedicates the “remigium alarum” (6. 19) to Apollo. Thus Daedalus’ world has been turned inside out. He swims in the air, and rows with oars of wings. This is comparable to Aeneas’ escapade in Greek armor. In each case, the world is upside down, or inside out. The reverse of what is expected is what occurs. Another comparison is that in Book 6 the narrator calls the Minotaur “Veneris monimenta nefandae” (6.26) and at the beginning of Book 2 Aeneas calls his pain “infandum” (2.2). Thus the Minotaur and Aeneas’ anguish over the loss of his homeland is unspeakable. Yet in either case a traumatic and monstrous event has occurred which renders an unspeakable burden.

III

Thus far the connection between the image of the labyrinth and Book 2 has been firmly established, both in terms of an abstract analysis, and a more concrete comparison between the events

of Book 2 and the Daedalus doors. Now we will see how Vergil uses the labyrinth image to blur the bounds between his voice and Aeneas' voice in Book 2.

Recall that Eleanor Winsor Leach writes that the lack of narrative authority in the *ekphrasis* of the Daedalus doors "sets up a tension between seeing and interpretation that may apply to other moments of the journey conveyed by reported description" (Leach 120). This tension is not only present in the Daedalus ekphrasis, but is also present in Aeneas' narration in Book 2. Close examination of the proem in Book 1 and what is really the mini-proem of Book 2 shows that Vergil really intends for Book 2 to be poetry spoken from Aeneas' mouth as much as he intends that it should be spoken from his own.

The beginning of Book 2 refers back to the proem of Book 1. The most noticeable evidence for this is his diction at the beginning of Book 2. Aeneas will have to renew ("renovare") and to remember ("meminisse" lit: to have remembered) his pains for the narration, even as Vergil asks the muse to recall (memora) the reasons behind Juno's anger. In addition to this diction for memory Aeneas asks a single, sharp rhetorical question which resembles Vergil's "Tantaene animis caelestibus irae?" (1.11). Aeneas asks "Quis talia fando/ Myrmidonum Dolopumve aut duri miles Ulixi/ temperet a lacrimis?" (2.7). Finally Vergil calls Aeneas "Pater Aeneas" (2.2). *Why?* Aeneas has not yet succeeded at his task, nor has he reached Italy. What could be the reason for calling him "Pater" here? It is my suggestion that Aeneas is Pater, because in this passage he is also "Auctor" (which wouldn't have fit metrically as "pater" does). Thus Vergil makes Aeneas take his place as narrator, with the full authority of interpretation.

But what purpose does this serve? The answer lies in Book 2's mini-proem. Aeneas says "et jam nox umida caelo/praecipitat suadentque cadentia sidera somnos" (2.8-9). This sentence is more than just a beautiful way of referencing the time of day. It also calls up associations with the labyrinth motif. Aeneas is signaling to his audience that his account will be a creation, or a work of art. He will have to *re-member* the fall of Troy. Thus Vergil abdicates his authority in Book 2 in favor of Pater Aeneas, who

leads us back into the labyrinth of fallen Troy. Not only must Aeneas contain his passion within it, he must also conceal his passions inside it.

Thus the retelling of the fall of Troy is a kind of therapeutic act, in which Vergil wants Aeneas to speak himself. Aeneas will rebuild the maze of Troy, sharing interpretive authority with Vergil, and he will do so by using the labyrinth as an image of sublimated trauma. So Vergil's voice and Aeneas voice together are the thread which will lead us out of the maze into which we are cast by the mini-proem of Book 2. Aeneas' narration in Book 2 takes on greater significance as a cathartic performance, and Vergil effaces his own presence as narrator in order to give life and depth to his great Hero.

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