

What was the Trojan Horse Made Of?: Interpreting Vergil's *Aeneid*

The most startling feature of the *Aeneid*'s narrative economy is the flashback represented by books 2 and 3, the account of the fall of Troy and then of Aeneas's wanderings told in Carthage by Aeneas to Dido. Startling it is not in the context of Vergilian imitation of Homer: Aeneas tells his story to Dido as Odysseus had told parts of his to the Phaeacians in the *Odyssey*.¹ But while the *Odyssey* serves as a rich subtext for the *Aeneid*, it does not serve readers well if it dulls us to what is novel and, in my view, most characteristically Vergilian about the Roman poet's use of inset narrative, which he doubles or squares. For just as Aeneas's narrative to Dido is set near the beginning of Vergil's narrative to us, as the second and third of twelve books, so near the beginning of Aeneas's narrative we have the account of Sinon's² deception of the Trojans—by means of storytelling—which leads to their undoing as they accept the Trojan horse into the city. This is a short circuit of narrative and interpretation that no listener or interpreter can overlook. For me, it is the primal scene of narration and misinterpretation in the *Aeneid*.³

That this inner scene of narrative deception and misinterpretation is itself part of Aeneas's tale to Dido, which in different ways and for very different reasons leads to her undoing, and that Aeneas's account and Dido's suicide are in turn set within Vergil's narrative to us, has profound ramifications for our understanding of Vergil's text and of our own role and responsibilities as readers.⁴ In this paper, I wish not to examine the outward or centrifugal movement of this textual system but to move within, to what I see as an absence or void at the very heart of the work. Through an examination of a few of the more notorious of Vergilian puzzles (the wood of the horse at some length, the gates of horn and ivory more briefly), I intend to uncover this absence or set of absences for the reader and at the same time show that the reader has as full a role to play at the interpretive center as at the outer edges. First, however, we must descend into the abyss or, to evoke one of Vergil's most significant recurring images, enter the inner fold, Latin *sinus*, and take a closer look at Sinon, his narrative, and the Trojans' response. Selective close reading of this episode, this "primal scene of misinterpretation" as I have termed it, will occupy roughly half of the paper. As Vergil's Sibyl tells Aeneas,

"Easy the descent to Avernus. But to retrace one's steps and come out into the air above, that is the task, that is the hard part" (*facilis descensus Auerno. / sed reuocare gradum superasque euadere ad auras / hoc opus, hic labor est*, 6.126, 128-29).

With a craft that has often been explicated and analyzed in rhetorical terms,⁵ Sinon manipulates his listeners; indeed, the first admirer of Sinon's oratory is none other than Aeneas himself, who tells Dido quite clearly that he and the other Trojans were taken in by rhetorical trickery. At this point in his own narrative Sinon has insinuated that the hated Greek leaders Odysseus, Agamemnon and Menelaus would all be pleased if the Trojans were to behave as Trojans could be expected to behave and were to kill this errant Greek. Aeneas comments: "we Trojans then truly burned to inquire and investigate the reasons, ignorant as we were of such base crimes and Greek art. Trembling he continued and spoke with feigned emotion" (*tum uero ardemus scitari et quaerere causas, / ignari scelorum tantorum artisque Pelasgae, / prosequitur pauitans et ficto pectore fatur*, 2.105-107). The Trojans react in precisely the contrarian way Sinon had calculated.

Here and elsewhere Aeneas interrupts Sinon's narrative to speak to Dido, that is to shift "up" or "out" one level. We readers or listeners are likewise encouraged to shift our attention from Sinon and the Trojans to Aeneas and Dido and then to Vergil and his readers. At this point the reader is invited to ask herself: how long did the Trojans, or their descendants the Romans, remain ignorant of Greek art? How much of any account is rhetorical manipulation, how much truth? Gradually we may surmise that rhetorical manipulation is only more *apparent* in the inner circle than in the outer circles of narration.

Sinon is not the author of his own text. I mean neither Aeneas, who is our only witness, nor Vergil; these are obvious. Clearly Sinon is only acting out a script prepared for him by Ulysses. Characteristically, the author is both present and absent: he appears as a "character" in Sinon's text, and though this Ulysses acts plausibly, the entire action imputed to him is fictional (even within the fictional bounds of the *Aeneid*). In "fact," he is not offstage, but merely concealed: he is inside the Trojan horse.

Now, as Ulysses knows, rhetoric can not work on deaf—or wax-stuffed—ears.⁶ The final decision to break down the walls of Troy and lead the horse within is the Trojans'. How do they come to make such a disastrous decision? It's not as if they haven't heard what they ought to do. Aeneas begins his "unspeakable" narrative (*infandum*, 2.1) before Sinon's entry on the scene. With omniscient hindsight he depicts the mountainous horse left by the Greeks, built with Athene's help: "They pretend it is an offering made for their return" (*uotum pro reditu simulant*, 2.17).

But here even Aeneas's language takes on ambiguities characteristic, as we will see, of Sinon's discourse. Both words of the phrase *pro reditu* permit double meanings. Is the Trojan horse an offering against their return, that is, to win their return? This is its ostensible purpose. But it may also be an offering "in place of their return"—for they have not returned. So far by "return" we have understood "return to Greece." But of course, since the Greeks now appear to be gone, it might refer to a return to Troy, either the return to Troy from Greece that Sinon's fiction describes or simply from the hidden harborage at Tenedos, which will in fact take place. Aeneas's remark, "Such was the rumor going about" (*ea fama uagatur*, 2.17)—we would respond, "which rumor?"—masks the uncertainty and instability of the assertion with an imputation of its credibility.

Long before Ulysses' script begins, and even ignoring the ambiguities of *pro reditu*, the Trojans are presented with both possibilities. Thymoetes first argues that the horse be brought within the walls and placed on the citadel (2.32–33), while Capys and others want it destroyed. "The uncertain populace is divided into contrary opinions" (*scinditur incertum studia in contraria uulgi*, 2.39). It is at a moment when the multiplicity of possible interpretations has left the Trojans paralyzed, suspended in inaction between hope and fear, that Laocoon appears. The very passion and directness of his position defeats his purpose. He gives the Trojans no room to make up their own minds. Unlike Sinon—if I may use vocabulary developed in particular by Wolfgang Iser—Laocoon offers no *Leerstellen* or "gaps" (literally "empty spaces") by the filling of which his listeners could make his text their own.⁷ But Laocoon contravenes not simply recent reader-response theory. Contrary to classical injunctions to begin with a *captatio benevolentiae* to render his listeners willing to listen and learn, Laocoon insults them. In the first words they—and we—hear, he asks them if they are insane. Considering the inevitability of the poem and not the rhetoric, Servius comments: "he well begins thus, because they were not going to believe one urging sensible things."⁸ Perhaps not, but his tactlessness does not help those Trojans, however few, who are inclined to be more cautious. No matter that his suspicions are well-founded, that he hits the nail on the head: the Greeks are hidden within, as he suggests, and it is a war machine of sorts (2.45–47). His well-aimed guesses remain without effect, as does the spear he hurls against the horse itself: "a hollow sound emanates from the cavern, and the hollows seem to moan" (*utroque recusso / insonuere cauae gemitumque dedere cauernae*, 2.52–53).

Laocoon is an example of an orator who fails because he assaults rather than deceives and seduces his audience. After ten unsuccessful years, the

Greeks themselves have abandoned the siege and frontal assault. While Laocoon sees this, can even articulate this, he fails to make their strategy his own. Entering next, Sinon proves to be Laocoon's opposite, in every way imaginable. For example, while Laocoon dashes on under his own power (*decurrit*, 2.41), Sinon is dragged in ([*pastores*] *trahebant*, 2.58). Laocoon displays the force of his will (*ardens*, 2.41); that Sinon's hands are tied behind his back (2.57) implies the opposite.

Correction: it leads his observers to infer that he is unwilling. It is important for us to have stumbled here in the "reading process," to have, as it were, overread. For the moment let us simply note how easily interpreters are led to make such inferences, and in particular what role schematized contrasts play in leading them to infer. The significance of these observations will emerge in due course.

While both characters enter in the company of others (Laocoon: *magna comitante caterua*, 2.40; Sinon: *pastores*, 2.58), Laocoon's accompanying band is nonfunctional in terms of the action. Its only function is to mark "accompaniment" and thus provide a formal balance to Sinon's captors, in other words, to establish a degree zero for the contrasts to follow. Looking back a few lines, we may now see that the involvement of the Trojan audience in Sinon's story is emblemized by another complex of similarities/differences at the appearance of both: while Laocoon shouts, his companions and his listeners are silent; in contrast to Sinon's initial silence, it is his captors who shout (*magno . . . clamore*, 2.58). Vergil must smile when I describe Laocoon's companions and auditors as silent. Of course the narrator does not tell us that. Again we have constructed it out of an absence of contradiction and the presence of the counterbalancing cry of Sinon's captors. Even as he presents Laocoon, a figure for the bad poet who leaves no gaps, Vergil shows that he practices Sinon's art of gap making; we Trojans complete the equation.

Laocoon begins his harangue when he is barely in hailing range; Sinon is at first silent. While both begin with questions, Laocoon directs his straight at his fellow citizens (*o miseri . . . ciues*, 2.42), while Sinon apostrophizes some absent and never-specified interlocutors. Laocoon's address of his audience places him in direct confrontation with them. By his initial silence and then his use of the traditional apostrophe—a rhetorical turning one's back on one's present audience to address absent presences—Sinon creates the first of the many treacherous gaps he is so clever at opening and into which the naive Trojans will, to their destruction, step.

None is more characteristic than his dazzling use of negatives, often doubled.⁹ But the many negatives, simple and double, only reinforce the dazzling contrafactuals Sinon conjures up right from the start. The Tro-

jans have just unraveled "I'll not deny I'm from the Argive race" to figure out that he is a Greek, when he hits them (*hoc primum*) with this zinger: *Nec, si miserum Fortuna Sinonem / finxit, uanum etiam mendacemque improba finget* (2.79–80). One might translate, "Nor, if Fortune has made Sinon wretched, will the bitch also make him empty of believability and mendacious." It is open to anyone to ask: "Well, what if she didn't make him wretched?" Sinon continues to speak the truth he promised, because the "truth" of a conditional does not depend on the truth of either premise or conclusion but only on the logical relation between them.¹⁰

What is so daring is that Vergil has Sinon play a purloined-letter game. The way he formulates the sentence practically begs the Trojans to consider the negative. As punctuated and translated, the if-clause (protasis) is embedded in the then-clause (apodosis). Vergil's readers would have understood this even before editors devised punctuation because the collocation *nec si* signals as much. But if one removes the mental comma after *nec* and allows it to negate the entire protasis, Sinon would actually be heard to say: "and if Fortune has not made Sinon wretched, the bitch will indeed make him empty of believability and mendacious."

Vergil too is involved in a purloined-letter game, or should we say a game of purloined letters. Look again at this utterance. Right in the middle of the protasis (*si miserum fortuna Sinonem finxit*), Sinon utters his name for the first time. It is of course the traditional name for the character, one of many traditional figures earlier Latin poets and Vergil took over unchanged from Greek literature. Coming right after *nec si*, however, one may well wonder if some of Sinon's listeners didn't for an instant think that yet another "if not" clause had been imbedded: *si miserum . . . , si nonem . . .* Of course, we pull ourselves up short. That is nonsense. But as this sentence shows, in the linguistic matrix of Latin, "Sinon"'s syllables take on a new life. His name is more than an echo of those "sinuous" serpents that wind themselves around Laocoon and through the whole book,¹¹ more than a personification of what I have termed one of Vergil's central images, the *sinus* or fold. Literally—I mean this graphically or "letterally"—Sinon is "Mr. If Not."

Such word play is not only Homeric, it is—and how apt for Sinon!—archetypally Ulyssean. Homer's Odysseus tells Polyphemos:

Kyklops, are you asking me my famous name? Well, then, I will tell you. But you are to give me hospitality, just as you promised. No-one [*Οὔτις*] is my name, and my mother and my father and all my other companions call me No-one.

[9.367]

Polyphemos, in his cups, responds, "No-one I will eat last with his companions, / the others beforehand. This will be the token of my hos-

pitality to you." This utterance is literally true, true in a way its speaker cannot understand. He will eat "no one" last, because he will henceforth eat no one at all. Homer exploits a yet more complex pun when in several constructions οὐτις becomes μή τις. Strikingly similar to the pun "si non / Sinon," the two words heard or read as one combine to make μῆτις, which is "wily cleverness," Odysseus's defining characteristic.¹²

Latinists will be swift to protest: anatomizing the name "Sinon" as "if not" involves a false quantity, for the "i" is short in the character's name, long in the conjunction "if." This is a sound, indeed a strong objection, one, however, which can be met by pointing not only to Vergil's own occasional variations in the case of proper names¹³ but to the rules and practice of Classical Latin word play. Both examples and explicit ancient testimony establish clearly that the variation in vowel length would not have put "Sinon" out of the pun's range of "si non."¹⁴

Ultimately, of course, it is not only the opening contrafactual, with its two or three levels of embedded "if nots," but the entire episode, studded with "if nots" and related phenomena (i.e., pluperfect subjunctives), which compels me to believe that this pun was carefully calculated by Vergil. This is matched on the thematic level, where we see what it means that Sinon is the master of the contrafactual, of evoking and manipulating that which is not. For the whole story of the oracle and intended sacrifice is a tissue of lies. Let us pick it up where the pace of Sinon's narrative quickens. The dread day arrived. Sinon was readied for the ritual sacrifice, but he escaped.¹⁵ His words "Escaped death and burst my chains" (*eripui . . . leto me et uincula rupi*, 2.134) can of course be an example of hysteron proteron, but remember: none of this happened. In what sense does one imaginary action precede another? Again, elaborately figurative language has the paradoxical effect of increasing our assumption that its referent is real, because once we have involved ourselves in the process of making sense, in decoding, we do not look back to see if the effort was well spent. As in many a business venture or defense scheme, once an investment is made, it must be kept going. Sinon makes his rickety Trojan Horse System everybody's project, even its intended victims'. And damned if it doesn't fly!¹⁶

Sinon continues: "I hid invisible through the night in the swampy bog and sedge until they gave sail, if perchance they would" (*limosoque lacu per noctem obscurus in ulua / delitui dum uela darent, si forte dedissent* (2.135-36). The point of Servius's comment seems to be to increase readers' appreciation of Sinon's rhetorical skill in navigating this treacherous passage:

"If perchance they would" is ambiguous: for he neither denies nor confirms that they have sailed, lest he either remove their sense of security or [reveal]

what he said above is false, that the Greeks could not sail without a human sacrifice. . . . It is a rhetorical trick to use ambiguous language in tight places in the argument.¹⁷

We must, however, remember that since Sinon is in control here, any tight spot is of his own making. His words *si forte dedissent* risk exposing the whole illogic of his story, for they clearly refer to the fact that the Greeks no longer have the sacrificial victim Apollo's oracle supposedly demanded (2.116–19; cf. n. 3). It was a bad joint in the whole story.¹⁸ Why does he bring it up again? To anticipate their objections? Instead of letting the Trojans realize that this is a problem you are trying to cover up, refer to it boldly yourself. Just act as if it's not a problem and, ten to one, they won't think it is either.

All this is absolutely true. Yet it seems to me that Vergil's point is not so much to show how clever a rhetorician or mass psychologist Sinon is as to show how gullible the Trojans, indeed, all readers are.¹⁹ For this we want to highlight gaps and inconsistencies, not bridge or reconcile them. The last clause, as we've seen, once again brings the glare of a spotlight onto a major inconsistency in the story. And that is taking it as Sinon's original future perfect indicative now in indirect speech.²⁰ But of course the original thought never crossed his mind, except as a line in a script. Without an original thought to render, the pluperfect subjunctive—for the third time in this passage—reveals itself as a past contrafactual: "If perchance they had given sail (but they have not)." And once again, the contrafactual is true. The Trojans are presented not only with an astounding gap, they are presented with the truth. But they do not have ears to hear.

Sinon gets downright sloppy as he pulls out all the stops. He says he has no hope of seeing his fatherland, his sweet children or his beloved father, any and all of whom the Greeks may punish for his crime. While "crime" raises once again the spectre of the problem of a Greek departure without the supposedly necessary sacrifice, "sweet children" presents a new problem. I suppose the failure to mention a wife is easily explained (perhaps they're offspring of a concubine), but didn't you say you were sent to Palamedes *primis ab annis* (2.87), which one naturally takes to mean "as a boy"?²¹ That these are purely rhetorical children tossed into a tearjerking peroration is perfectly clear. Or is the omission of a wife's name a discordant note meant to distract attention from the more serious chronological error? Even as we reject that as supersubtle, we may begin to suspect that as interpreters we could probably justify anything.

After several more invocations of things that are not, gods *conscia ueri* for one, and after further imbedded conditional clauses,²² Sinon closes, *miserere animi non digna ferentis*. One naturally takes the *non* with *digna*

and renders: "have pity on a soul bearing what he has not deserved." But we and we alone see how much truer it would be to take *non* with *ferentis*: "have pity on a soul not suffering what he deserves." Which is of course what Sinon is really asking the Trojans to do.²³

Priam's first words are expansive and magnanimous; for Aeneas to describe the *words* as "friendly" (*dictis . . . amicis*, 2.147) is ironic in the extreme. Words themselves, as Sinon's use of them has shown, are hardly friendly, and Sinon has so manipulated the situation that even in our eyes Priam's words now hide dangerous truths beneath friendly lies. "Whoever you are," Priam says (implying—so Servius suggests—"although you are an enemy"), "you will now be ours."²⁴ Alas, the Trojans ought to have taken them at face value—"whoever you are, you aren't what you say you are." Priam urges Sinon henceforth to forget the Greeks he has lost (*amissos hinc iam obliuiscere Graios*, 2.148). Sinon can smile to himself and say, "Sure old man, I'll forget all the Greeks I've lost—none, in other words!"

Priam is brimming with questions about the horse: For what purpose was it built? Who authorized it? Is it a religious offering or a machine of war? This is just what Sinon has been waiting for, and, as Aeneas again reminds Dido of his rhetorical training,²⁵ Sinon swears a solemn oath with hands raised aloft. This is an elaborate charade meant to solemnize his public transfer of allegiance from the Greeks to the Trojans: that the gods will permit him to abrogate the oaths binding him and to hate his former friends. Of the many subtle deceptions that follow, let me point only to the oath with which he begins.²⁶ Bringing up the rear of the divinities and sacred objects Sinon calls on to witness his oath are "altars and unspeakable swords / I escaped, and the gods' fillets / I wore as a sacrificial victim" (*arae ensesque nefandi, / quos fugi, uittaeque deum, quas hostia gessi*, 2.155–56). Servius glosses "I wore" with "almost" (*paene*, on 2.156 [T-H 1.245]). Actually, Servius seems to err, since according to his account, the fillets were already around his temples before he escaped (2.133). But as the rest of the note indicates, the issue is that the sacrifice didn't take place at all. This, however, is to strain at gnats and swallow a camel. The problem is not that Sinon escaped. Rather, the whole story Sinon tells is a fabrication. There never were altars, never were sacrificial fillets. The swords are "unspeakable" in another sense.²⁷ Sinon is swearing on nothing, trifles lighter even than the handkerchief so craftily employed by his descendant Iago.²⁸

Throughout, the most daring aspect of Sinon's speech is that his lies are fabricated out of literal truths. They have the effect of lies only when readers overlook the equivocations. His final period—significantly, introduced by "but if" (*sin*, 2.192)—is true in a way that pulls the ground

out from under Sinon. And it serves him right: the statement that the horse was made large so that it could not be brought into Troy where it could protect the people as a new cult object (2.185–188) ought to have been sufficient. But now Sinon, caught up in his peroration, cannot resist being yet more explicit.

For if your hand were to violate this gift to Minerva,
then there would be great destruction (may the gods rather turn this omen
on him [i.e. Calchas]) to Priam's empire and the Phrygians;
but if at your hands it were to climb into the city,
then on the offensive Asia to the walls of Pelops
will come, and that destiny awaits our descendants.²⁹

Once again, the pluperfect subjunctives represent Calchas's reported future perfect indicatives, but at *ascendisset* (2.192) there is a whiff of a past contrafactual, as if the time when this could be done were past. It's not, of course, but the mere suggestion it is will make the Trojans rush the more precipitously to destroy themselves. Sinon understands the apodosis of this condition to be an outrageous lie—he knows that to ascend with the horse into the city the Trojans will have to breach their walls, and that between the soldiers in the horse and those that will pour in, Troy will not come to Greek walls but Greece will destroy Asia. Such prophecies are traditionally couched in equivocal language; think of poor Pyrrhus, think of poor Croesus. The equivocation within the equivocation is based on the equation that Asis stands for Troy and Troy will become Rome. Only because the Trojans did bring the horse into the city was Troy destroyed, Aeneas sent forth, and Rome founded. Then indeed did the *urbs*—and to a Latin speaker *urbs* meant one city and one city only—conquer Greece.

The placement of *venturam* at the beginning of 2.194 supports this suggestion; it echoes the same case occupying the same metrical slot in 1.22 (but masculine, *venturum*) referring to the manifest destiny of Rome to conquer Carthage. But it is in the last phrase, *et nostros ea fata manere nepotes*, that Vergil gives us the strongest hint that we are to think of Rome's destiny. Obviously, all nations have descendants, but *nepotes* has a very Roman ring to it.³⁰ It is, however, the mention of posterity altogether that projects us into the complex historical project that is the *Aeneid*. Nor is this futurity necessary for the prophecy. On the face of it, it would be stronger and more attractive if the Trojan revenge Sinon promises were to come at once. But merely as oracular bombast, Sinon tosses in *nepotes*, and pulls the ground out from under himself.

Sinon and I have been talking about, and you and the Trojans have been looking at the Trojan horse for some time now. What is there about this horse? Why have I titled my essay "What was the Trojan horse made

of?" Quite simply, because the problem of the wood is a paradigm for the *Aeneid* itself. It is perhaps not the poem's most profound conundrum and certainly not its most famous, but it is, as I read it, the most instructive puzzle that Vergil has structured into his text. In other words, playing with it—not necessarily solving it—is heuristically valuable.

One line after the first mention of the horse (2.15), its sides are specified as fir,³¹ and within the space of 243 lines no fewer than four words are used to describe the wood of the horse.³² *Abies*, "by lexicographers construed," is a silver fir, the tree or its wood. *Acernus* is an adjective, from *acer*, maple. *Robur, roboris* is generically oak, that is, even in its most specific sense, it embraces several species.³³ *Pineus* is the adjectival form of *pinus*, any one of several species of pine.

It is fair to say that the universal opinion of Vergilian scholarship is that this represents a problem, although not a terribly serious one. It was a puzzle to be solved already for Servius, who tackles it at the earliest possible moment, at the mention of "fir" in 2.16. He only believes he has to deal with three different types of wood, and by attributing to each wood emblematic significance, he creates an allegorical horse that is made of all three.³⁴ A real wooden horse might just be fir, maple and pine all at the same time. More recently, R. G. Austin attributes to a Professor Gordon Cooper of Brisbane the argument that "the Horse had an outer sheath of *abies* (softwood) and an inner frame of *acer* (hardwood)." ³⁵

The purely mechanical suggestion that the horse was fabricated of various woods, for all its piety, has hardly met with approval.³⁶ The two main avenues scholars have taken to solve the problem are (a) to argue that the variation is more apparent than real, and (b) to consider the fact that our information about the horse comes from two different speakers. The basis of (a) is an appeal to figurative language: each occurrence is an instance of metonymy, one specific type of wood either for another type or for the genus.³⁷ The former would be the "soft," the latter the "hard" version of the hypothesis; adherents of the "hard" position would have to say that we can have no idea what wood it was. The basis of (b) is the fact, of utmost significance, that it is Aeneas who describes the horse as of fir and pine, Sinon who describes it as of maple and oak. While (a) could resolve all discrepancies, the fact that each of the two speakers uses two different terms means that any (b) explanation requires some (a) as well. Most scholars do in fact take a syncretistic approach. For example, R. D. Williams employs (a) arguments to eliminate one problem (*robur*)—I will discuss the logic of this shortly—and to equate Aeneas's two terms *abiete* and *pineae*. This leaves Sinon's "maple" odd-wood-out, which R. D. Williams says "may be taken as a sign either of lack of revision or of lack of special interest in carpentry." ³⁸

"Lack of revision" is a wild card in all our considerations.³⁹ But leaving that aside, let us first consider Aeneas's *abies* and *pinus*. Few even admit there is a problem here; R. D. Williams is one of many who have no trouble reconciling fir with pine. Now it is true that both fir and pine trees are classified as genera of the family *pinaceae*, and contemporary common English parlance does indiscriminately use "pine" (less frequently "fir") to denote the entire family. For those who attend to such things, however, the two are quite distinct. I do not mean only modern botanists. In his survey of building materials, Vitruvius, who was a near contemporary of Vergil, writing in the late Republic and early Augustan period,⁴⁰ devotes a chapter of book 2 to timber. In his mind, "fir" and "pine" are clearly distinct. To the properties of the "fir" a whole section is devoted,⁴¹ while the pine is often paired with the cypress (2.9.12-13) and is said to have leaves like the larch (2.9.17). While he classes both pine and fir as smooth trees, there is no question that Vitruvius, presumably representing the standard opinion of Roman dendrologists, regarded them as distinct species.⁴²

But Vitruvius be damned. The attraction of allowing fir and pine to denote the same tree is too great for most, because both terms are Aeneas's. We would then have this formula: Aeneas always refers to the wood as the wood of a soft gymnosperm, while Sinon refers to it as a deciduous tree, likely maple. To explain this discrepancy, we appeal to the character of the speakers. Obviously, Aeneas is correct. He is the truthful narrator, Sinon the liar. But why would he lie about this trifle, when he has to get the Trojans to swallow much bigger things? Austin, on to something, "suspect[s] that *acernis* is a deliberate inaccuracy, a brilliant Virgilian touch to lend colour to Sinon's 'act' by a pretence of innocent ignorance—and the Trojans, knowing pinewood when they saw it, would feel superior to this simpleton."⁴³

In a truly exhaustive analysis one would have to consider why it is we take Aeneas's claim that the horse is another type of wood altogether as the objective standard against which to measure Sinon's lies, and Trojan credulity.⁴⁴ Scholarship, as is its wont, has generally tried to diminish rather than increase the complexities. And if one is determined to solve the problem, one can usually do so. For example, almost all commentators, from Servius to Williams, exclude the third of the four terms on the first pass, by the following logic: *robur* (186), in its strictest sense "oak," is frequently, even commonly used to refer to any hardwood; by a further extension it could be used of strength in general. Therefore, since it can be read as "hardwood" and that can be made to square with "maple," it is read that way.

The metonymic use of *robur* to mean "hardwood" is unexceptional in

poetry; indeed it is typical of poetic, particularly epic diction. All the more reason to proceed with care, for Vergil often conveys the richest ambiguities precisely by using the most traditional of metonymies. "Sister Anna, what nightmares frighten and paralyze me," Dido begins in book 4. "What new guest who has arrived on our shores! Bearing himself so handsomely! What a brave spirit! How strong in arms!"⁴⁵ The last line is particularly rich in traditionally poetic figurative language. One could talk about *os* (in the first half, *quem sese ore ferens*): his appearance is handsome, but since *os* is specifically "mouth" and by a metonymy in another direction often means "utterance," this line could be taken as pointing to Aeneas's verbal representation, his narration. It is not this that I wish to talk about but the very last phrase, *quam forti pectore et armis*! I have translated it as every student of Latin is taught to translate it: "What a brave spirit! How strong in arms!" reading *pectus* metonymically for "heart" or "spirit" and *arma* for "war." But at the so-called literal level, these same words clearly describe Dido's fascination with Aeneas's physical appearance. She is erotically stimulated by his "massive chest" and—taking *armis* now not from *arma* but from *armus*—his "mighty shoulders and upper arms."⁴⁶ That *armus* is more often used of animals' body parts is itself suggestive. Vergil's mode of concealing the literal behind or under, or should I say in the folds (*sinus*) of the traditional and poetic figurative senses, itself conveys a meaning: conventional, i.e. poeticizing language covers over and conceals subconscious desire. In other words, Vergil plays with his readers and their expectations by constructing his text so that one, often banal or superficial meaning emerges if they understand the term according to its common "poetic" figural sense, while a more interesting sense emerges when the literal is considered.

We must read Sinon's *robur* with as much care as we do Dido's *quam forti pectore et armis*. In fact, Sinon's ever-infolding, sinuously serpentine and if-notty *roboribus* presents a yet more complex example, for instead of two traceable levels, there are three. As I have said, *robur* is strictly "oak," then by metonymy "any hardwood," and then by what seems more metaphor than further metonymy, "strength," even military strength or troops. The majority of commentators have gone for the standard metonymy: generic hardwood. This attracts them because it removes, to their satisfaction at least, a discrepancy with Sinon's specific *acernus*. Of course, there are other discrepancies in Sinon's account; there is simply one more if one takes *robur* as, well, *robur*, "oak." It is revealing that commentators, like war-weary Trojans, want either to overlook or to resolve any and all discrepancies. It may be programmatic for Vergil's poetry that those who take the banal "poetic" metonymy without a sec-

ond thought are doomed to misread. If literal "oak" is an undertone to the banal metonymy, then the metaphorical is the overtone—and hearing that would have saved the day.

Now *robur* is common to denote a military force.⁴⁷ It is always used in the singular to refer to the fighting force as a unit, a collective.⁴⁸ One and only one extant plural usage precedes Vergil's here. It just happens to come from the opening of the one Latin poem which influenced Vergil more than any other, with the arguable exceptions of Ennius's *Annales* and Lucretius's *De rerum natura*. That poem is Catullus's artfully crafted mini-"Peleus" epic, which begins roughly thus:

The pines, offspring of Mt. Pelias, once
are said to have swum through the liquid waves of Neptune
to the waves of Phasis and Aeetea boundaries,
when the chosen youths, the oaks of Argive youth,
wishing to bring back the golden fleece from Colchis
dared to run through the salty shallows with their swift stern,
sweeping the blue seas with blades of fir.
For them the goddess who watches over cities' high citadels
herself made the course fly with a light breeze,
joining the piney fabric to the curved hull.⁴⁹

In rapid succession we have "pine," "piney," "fir"—and *robora*, "oaks," meaning the strongest. Aeneas's *delecta* to describe the crack troops selected to be enclosed in the horse (*huc delecta uirum sortiti corpora furtim / includunt*, 2.18–19) echoes Catullus's *lecti* referring to a band of the best Greek heroes enclosed in a piney structure, among other comparable passages.⁵⁰ It is thus the peculiar collection of timber that guarantees we are to recall the opening of Catullus's poem in particular. And this passage is the key: if you know your Catullus, you may understand that *roborebus textis* means that the pick of the Greek fighting force is in there.⁵¹

The Trojans will not have read Catullus; such delights are for Roman readers and their descendants only. Likewise, the puzzle of the four woods, which can be turned this way and that, is a puzzle for readers and interpreters. In the face of this interpretive conundrum, arena for a debate that has now resounded at least 1600 years, we might wonder if Vergil's purpose was not the creation of just this insoluble puzzle. He has polished his mirror so finely that interpreters see their own reflection in it. Of course, we don't see that at first, for Vergil is subtle enough to give those who would "resolve" the problem starting points. But none has convinced, and none can convince the interpretive community for long. If we (I mean the community) see the mirror and look in it, we will also see our own desire for a solution: we see ourselves wanting to solve the problem. Having assumed there is an answer, we exclude what

is most difficult about the evidence, and force what remains into shape. An honest assessment of our collective mirror image tells us that we are much like the Trojans.⁵²

As I read it, the puzzle of the Trojan horse's wood is the *Aeneid in nuce*. It is the text polished to serve as a mirror for interpreters, so that sooner or later interpreters see themselves in it and realize that in fact the text is a mirror, a blank, a screen onto which its readers project their desires. The blander a blank, the easier for the reader to fill, the better the surface on which to project those desires. The Trojans wanted the Greeks to be gone, they wanted the war to be over; they just needed a pretext to believe it. And as I have hinted briefly, Aeneas, bearer of the report of Sinon and the Trojan horse to Dido, is himself both a Sinon and a Trojan horse to Dido's Troy. He is the screen onto which Dido projects her desires, at once revealed and concealed in her first utterance to Anna cited above. With its four woods—a thing that cannot be made—the Trojan horse is an emblem of the gaping text, Vergil's as well as Sinon's. The Vergilian term that translates that blank or gap is *sinus*. It is that which we, as readers and commentators, rush to fill as eagerly as the desirous lover rushes to fill the bosom, lap or crotch (also *sinus*) of the desired other.

If the puzzle of the wood of the horse is, as I asserted, paradigmatic and of heuristic value, the skills we have acquired playing with it should be transferable to other problem patches. The *Aeneid* offers many, from the "friendly silences of the moon" (*amica silentia lunae* 2.255) to the Golden Bough, which, in "hesitating" (*cunctantem*, 6.211), seems to resist Aeneas's tug. It seems to me that a still more famous, indeed notorious passage, by turning out to be another structured puzzle, another mirror of interpretation, both confirms my analysis of the Trojan horse and serves as a fitting conclusion, pointing not only by its structuration but thematically to the outer readership and to the very status of truth and fiction:

There are twin gates of Sleep, of which the one is said
to be of horn; through it easy exit is given to true shades;
the other has been made shiny with radiant elephant [i.e., ivory]
but the dead send false dreams to heaven [sc. through it].⁵³

To the embarrassment of Vergilian critics, it is through this second gate that Anchises sends his son and the Sibyl, apparently implying that Aeneas is a false dream. Many solutions have been proposed to explain this. On the whole they tend to be cleverer than most solutions to the puzzle of the woods. I will nonetheless not rehearse them, but merely assure the reader that after stepping back and reviewing them, we com-

mentators can see ourselves hustling if anything even more busily than in the case of the Trojan horse—Vergil might well have used one of his famous bee similes—engaged in what the current age calls “damage control.”

Let me slice into this daunting complex by observing that most commentators have assumed that true and false are unproblematically opposed. It should come as no surprise that truth and falsehood are slippery entities. If we look at Vergil’s passage, he tells us that the two gates are “twin.” Not unreasonably we infer that they must be similar in some way. Similar but not identical. Presumably the true is as distinguishable from the false as horn is from ivory. Now just how different is horn from ivory? While they are quite clearly not the same substance, the differences are relatively subtle. Pliny calls what elephants have “horn,”⁵⁴ and Martial refers to ivory, that is, elephant tusk, as *cornu Indicum*, “Indian horn.”⁵⁵ They are different, yes, but comparable; they are within the range of a comparison or figure of speech.

As I read the passage, the differences between the two substances, their physical properties and origins—dare we say “natural differences”?—pale beside the differences in their cultural connotations. The horn is itself a symbol of plenty, evocative of the golden age (e.g., *cornu copiae*). From it are fashioned drinking cups, funnels, trumpets, bugles, bows—items with primitive or bellicose associations. In contrast, ivory (*ebur*; Vergil uses the adjective *eburna*, 6.898) is employed in luxury items, and a long list of references can be assembled to testify to its connotations of beauty, elegance, and craftsmanship.⁵⁶

It is characteristic of Vergil to construct a system in such a way that eventually the pressure of interpretation forces us to examine the system as system. This I argued was the case with the wooden horse. Likewise, any analysis of the gates of horn and ivory must proceed by regarding the dichotomy as a system. Following the lead of the narrator we first assume horn and ivory are polar opposites. And yet, when we assert only a little independence, we see that they exhibit material similarities. At the very least, our initial assumption of radical opposition must be revised. Striving, as diaeretic thought always does, to assert a binary opposition, we may come back with “nature versus culture,” according to which we contrast horn left in its natural state with worked ivory. Horn does indeed appear unworked, “natural,” compared with highly crafted ivory. But “appear” and “compared” are highly significant words. Items such as drinking cups, however primitive or simple, only appear natural, as the lifestyles to which they belong only appear “natural” from the vantage point of more sophisticated cultures often, but not invariably, nostalgic for primitive simplicity.

This point in itself might be elaborated into a trenchant commentary on official Augustan nostalgia for primitive Roman virtues. In this context we would want to recall that of all Vergil's many references to rich and ornate ivory objects,⁵⁷ none is more significant than the prologue to *Georgics* 3, where, midway through his didactic poem, Vergil promises that one day he will write a much grander poem, on grander themes, to celebrate Augustus.⁵⁸ Here I want to cling more closely to the text of the *Aeneid*, and in particular to the items explicitly linked to the pair horn/ivory—truth and fiction—although the political context of these cannot be overlooked. The alignment of fiction and highly crafted ivory is obvious, even banal. But what is truth once we follow the calculus of the equation and consider that it is made of stuff not unlike the stuff of lies, and worse, that it only appears unadulterated? The difference is that while fiction displays its artificiality for all to see, what we take to be truth conceals it. Evident lies turn out to be more reliable than true words and reports to the extent that falsehoods reveal the work that has gone into their making.⁵⁹ If we link the craft of working ivory with that of working words, playing with the puzzle here involves a meditation on the subtle differences between historical and poetic accounts. What seems true is not always so. Highly crafted words, however, may have more value than a luxurious ivory carving, nor can we afford to let appreciation of artifice be only a leisure-time activity. If only the Trojans had, as Aeneas tells Dido, understood the Pelasgian arts, it would have saved them a great deal of trouble. In this light, for Anchises to allow the Romans only the unartistic, unrhethorical arts (*hae tibi . . . artes*, 6.852) is not the best advice after all.

But that is another puzzle.

Notes

- 1 Books 9–12, one-sixth of the *Odyssey* (four of the twenty-four books into which it was divided by the Hellenistic period), just as Aeneas's narrative, covering two of Vergil's twelve books, amounts to one-sixth of the *Aeneid*.
- 2 The name is stressed on the first syllable, the "i" short, the "o" long. The importance of pronouncing it thus will emerge in due course.
- 3 While not yet the absolute innermost fold of our narrative material; that would be the oracular pronouncement of 2.116–19. This too, as Servius already noted, includes a false statement in *virgine caesa* (116), for Iphigenia, spirited away to Tauris by Artemis, was not in fact sacrificed (see Servius here and on 2.118, *Servii Grammatici qui feruntur in Vergilii Carmina Commentarii*, ed. G. Thilo and H. Hagen (Leipzig, 1902–27), 1:238 (henceforth abbreviated "T-H").
- 4 I am currently developing these and related ideas in *The Gates of Ivory: A Reader's Aeneid*. For another brief recent account of Sinon's rhetoric, see K. W. Gransden, "The Fall of Troy," *Greece and Rome* 32 (1985): 60–72. Among the many virtues of Gransden's piece is his insistence on Aeneas as narrator and Dido as listener of book 2.
- 5 For example, Servius on 2.69 (T-H 1:228).

- 6 The "real fictional" Ulysses has not evinced knowledge of this at this mythical time, but Homer's and therefore Vergil's readers' Ulysses has—in that special time zone of literature.
- 7 See Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," *New Literary History* 3 (1971): 279–99, rpt. in *New Directions in Literary History*, ed. Ralph Cohen (Baltimore, 1974), 125–45, and Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore, 1974), 274–94; "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction," in *Aspects of Narrative*, ed. J. Hillis Miller (New York, 1971), 1–45; further, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, 1974; English trans. of *Die Appellstruktur der Texte: Unbestimmtheit als Wirkungsbedingung literarischer Prosa* [Konstanz, 1971]).
- 8 *O miseri, quae tanta insania, ciues?* (2.42); Servius here: *O MISERI: bene hoc coepit, quia non erant suadenti utilia credituri* (T-H 1:222).
- 9 At first the negatives seem simple, merely a rhetorical *variatio*: "'For my part I will tell you 100% truth, king, come what may,' he said, 'nor will I deny that I'm from the Argive race'" (*cuncta equidem tibi, rex, fuerit quodcumque, fatebor / uera,* inquit; *'neque me Argolica de gente negabo,* 2.77–78). Later Sinon does not simply say that he spoke out against the injustices done Palamedes; rather, he says, "I was not silent" (*nec tacui*, 2.94). And his Ulysses was not merely active: "he did not rest until" (*nec requieuit donec*, 2.100).
- 10 Servius attached to his comment on *finxit* of verse 80 the trenchant observation: "and one must note that Sinon's whole speech is mockery: for it both furthers his business and insults the Trojans' stupidity, as here" (*et notandum quia omnis Sinonis oratio diasyrtica est: nam et negotium exprimit, et Troianorum insultat stultitiae, ut hoc loco*, on 2.80 [T-H 1:230]).
- 11 Of the vast scholarship on Vergil, the long since classic article of Bernard Knox, "The Serpent and the Flame: The Imagery of the Second Book of the *Aeneid*," *American Journal of Philology* 71 (1950): 379–400, deserves mention.
- 12 Two words: 9.405, 406, 410; see Jenny Strauss Clay, *The Wrath of Athena* (Princeton, 1984), 119–20 and 119 n. 123 for further references.
- 13 For example, Dido's husband Sychaeus: long "y" 1.343 but short "y" elsewhere (1.348, 4.502, 552, 632, 6.474). This peculiarity was noted as long ago as Servius on 1.343 (T-H 1:121). See R. D. Williams on 5.571 (*P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Quintus* [Oxford, 1960], 151) for further discussion of Vergilian *incipites* in proper names.
- 14 Frederick Ahl, *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets* (Ithaca, 1985): "Varro and Latin poets both before and after him happily associate syllables with long and short versions of the same vowel" (35; for further examples and discussion, see 43 and 55–56). I generally find it easier to swallow Ahl's accounts of puns than anagrams, but I was moved mightily towards crediting the latter in principle by the genial suggestion of Professor Ann Bergren, who, hearing a version of this paper, pointed out on the spot that here, at the first occurrence of his name, Sinon is so declined (*Sinonem*) that what follows *si* is nothing other than an anagram of "name" (*nomen*).
- 15 R. G. Austin on *Aeneid* 2.133 (*P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Secundus* [Oxford, 1964], 74) compares Lucretius' Iphigenia (*de rerum natura* 1.87), but as there are only so many ways to describe woolen fillets round about one's head, the verbal echoes don't sound particularly distinct. On the other hand, since in many versions Iphigenia was not sacrificed but transported by Artemis at the last moment to live among the Taurians, "to be sacrificed like Iphigenia" may be another case of that which is not (cf. n. 3).
- 16 Some may think this is a joke. However, systems of violent oppression and genocide have frequently hit upon victim-involvement, often in seemingly trivial occupations, as a way of making the apparatus run smoothly. Likewise, prisoners are required to participate in the operation of their prisons. I will not risk minimizing modern horrors by adducing them to support a point in my analysis of Vergil; uncovering the principle as embodied in *Aeneid*, whether it was born of sights Vergil himself saw in the violence

and suppression of his own age, is the product of his imagination or of our own, is justified if it makes us more sensitive to the workings of such infernal machines.

- 17 *SI FORTE DEDISSENT medium se praebebat: nam nec negat, nec confirmat eos navigasse, ne aut eis demat securitatem, aut quod supra dixit falsum sit, non posse navigare Graecos, nisi homine immolato: ut illorum sit quicquid elegerint, et artis est in argumentorum angustia incertis uti sermonibus*, on 2.136 (T-H 1:241). The ellipsis in my translation marks the phrase *ut illorum sit quicquid elegerint*, which seems too ambiguous for me to risk translating. Does this refer to the Trojans who are to choose one of the two possibilities? Or has something dropped out so that it follows logically on the opening: Sinon's phrase "is ambiguous . . . so that [they don't know] which of the two to pick"? Or is there deeper confusion—perhaps referring to the Greeks who must or may pick someone else?
- 18 As Servius auctus explains, "because he could now not know what they would do, since he himself had fled" (*quia iam scire non poterat, quid facturi essent, cum ipse fugisset*, on 2.136 [T-H 1:241]). Scholars use "Servius auctus" or "Scholia Danielis" to refer to a more extensive tradition of comment within the Servian tradition, likely going back to Aelius Donatus, a fourth-century scholar and one of Servius's own sources. For a brief introduction to the manuscript tradition of Servius, see P. K. Marshall, "Servius," in *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics*, ed. L. D. Reynolds (Oxford, 1983), 385–88; on the relationship of Servius to Servius auctus, see the opening sections of G. P. Goold, "Servius and the Helen Episode," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 74 (1970): 101–68.
- 19 Gransden describes the Trojans' role brilliantly: "The listener makes the connections between disparate elements in the narrative. The technique is one of dialectical reading. . . . The listener . . . does Sinon's work for him, organizing a series of assertions, some true, some invented, into a coherent and plausible narrative sequence. . . . Again the Trojans put together pieces of narrative, true and false, and make their own credible synthesis" ("The Fall of Troy," 64). My additional point is really only that ultimately all reading is what Gransden describes as "dialectical."
- 20 In other words, a future perfect in *oratio recta* is represented by a pluperfect subjunctive in *oratio obliqua*.
- 21 "Sinon was not concerned with consistency so long as the Trojans did not notice inconsistency" (Austin on 2.87, *Liber Secundus*, 61)—as if Vergil did not create the Trojans' lack of concern for inconsistency.
- 22 Austin is right to call Sinon's appeal for pity on the gods *conscia ueri* "the culmination of his brazen impudence" (on 2.141, *Liber Secundus*, 77). That is how we must take it. And yet, is it in fact blasphemous? Knowing the Homeric gods, what divine powers *conscia ueri* are there for him to swear on? He swears by whatever faith remains undefiled among mortals. After Sinon's performance, that's not much. Indeed, true to his name, he embeds an if-clause into the asseveration (*si qua est*, 2.142) which casts further doubt on the existence of such faith. Servius too takes this as pure mockery of the Trojans (*diasyrtice deridet ut diximus*, on 2.142 [T-H 1:243]), referring to his own comment on 2.80. "Pity such great travails" (*miserere laborum / tantorum*, 2.143–44)—which is as much to say, pity nothing, for there were no such travails.
- 23 Aeneas tells his audience that Sinon's audience wept and pitied. *Ultro*. How does one render "*ultro*"? "Moreover," "to boot," "into the bargain" (Austin), "beyond the call of duty"? Servius's comment on 2.145 indicates that already he had to correct students and readers from taking it as "spontaneously, of their own accord," which he rejects as manifestly absurd, observing almost testily, "for he just asked for it" (*VLTRO autem non est sponte; nam iam rogauerat: sed insuper*, on 2.145 [T-H 1:243]). Of course it would be absurd; ironies are. And the irony here, if we let it out, is that the Trojans think they are responding of their own accord. Indeed we always imagine our responses to be our own.
- 24 Servius explains that he means *licet hostis sis*, citing an otherwise unknown passage in Livy where *quisquis es noster eris* appears as a formula (on 2.148 [T-H 1:243]).

- 25 *ille dolis instructus et arte Pelasga* (2.152). My "his" is a calculated ambiguity.
- 26 Of the others, one might note the potential ambiguity of *uiros* (2.158), of which Servius said: "as we said above, everything is said in mockery, for they [the words] can be referred both to the Greeks and the Trojans" (*FAS ODISSE VIROS ut supra diximus, omnia diasyrtice loquitur; nam et ad Graecos possunt, et ad Troianos referri*, on 2.158 [T-H 1:246]). The next phrase, "to bring everything into the open air," is supposed to mean "to tell all," but here Servius auctus cannot resist the subreading: "thus he seems subtly not to implicate himself in perjury; for he himself brings the crack troops out of the horse ('and Sinon in secret loosens the piney fastnesses'). And by this he wishes to be believed to speak against the Greeks while he speaks for them" (*hinc videtur subtiliter non se implicare periurio; ipse enim lectos hostes produxit ex equo "et pinea furtim laxat claustra Sinon"* [Aen. 2.258]. *et hoc vult credi contra Graecos dicere, cum pro ipsis dicat*, on 2.158 [T-H 1:246]). To reveal everything, "if anything is hidden," he adds (*si qua tegunt*, 2.159). Servius comments, "because of those things which hide in the horse" (*propter ea quae latent in equo*, on 2.159 [T-H 1:246]) "And I am not held by any laws of my fatherland" (*teneor patriae nec legibus ullis*). While a postponed *nec* is not unusual, Sinon's utterances always need to be checked. *Nec* could be taken to negate *legibus*: I am held not by any laws of my country. That is—I am held by things other than laws, for example: patriotism, sentiment. Then he ends his prologue by asking the Trojans to keep their promises. Being the man he is, he can of course not resist setting up complex if-clauses: "you only stand by your promises and, o Troy preserved, keep your faith, if I speak true and reveal great things" (*tu modo promissis maneat seruataque serues / Troia fidem, si uera feram, si magna rependam*, 2.160–61). Obviously, what if he shouldn't tell the truth? And to address a "Troy preserved" is to address a nonentity.
- 27 *Nefandi*; dare we compare *infandum*, 2.1, Aeneas's first word to Dido?
- 28 On similarities between Iago's and Sinon's rhetorical tactics, see Gransden, "The Fall of Troy," 63–64.
- 29 *nam si uestra manus uiolasset dona Mineruae, / tum magnum exitium (quod di prius omen in ipsum / conuertant!) Priami imperio Phrygibusque futurum; / sin manibus uestris uestram ascendisset in urbem, / ultro Asiam magno Pelopea ad moenia bello / uenturam, et nostros ea fata manere nepotes* (2.189–94).
- 30 Cf. Catullus' *Romuli nepotum* (49.1) and *Remi nepotes* (58.5).
- 31 *intexunt abiete costas* (2.16).
- 32 Four different woods, one of which appears in three cases: *abiete* (2.16); *acernis* (112); *roboribus* (186), *robur* (230) and *robore* (260); and *pineae* (258). For ease of reference, I give all six passages:

- 1) . . . *fracti bello fatisque repulsi
ductores Danaum tot iam labentibus annis
instar montis equum diuina Palladis arte
aedificant, sectaque intexunt abiete costas;
uotum pro reditu simulant; ea fama uagatur* (2.13–17);
- 2) *praecipue cum iam hic trabibus contextus acernis
staret equus, toto sonuerunt aethere nimbi* (2.112–13);
- 3) *hanc tamen immensam Calchas attolere molem
roboribus textis caeloque educere iussit,
ne recipi portis aut duci in moenia posset,
neu populum antiqua sub religione tueri* (2.185–88);
- 4) *tum uero tremefacta nouus per pectora cunctis
insinuat pavor, et scelus expendisse merentem
Laocoonta ferunt, sacrum qui cuspide robur
laeserit et tergo sceleratam intorserit hastam* (2.228–31);
- 5–6) *et iam Argiua phalanx instructis nauibus ibat
a Tenedo tacitae per amica silentia lunae
litora nota petens, flammis cum regia puppis*

*extulerat, fatisque deum defensu iniquis
inclusos utero Danaos et pinea furtim
laxat claustra Sinon. illos patefactus ad auras
reddidit equus laetique equo se robore promunt . . .* (2.254-60).

- 33 For example, *quercus, aescuius* (Oxford Latin Dictionary [Oxford, 1968-82], s.v. *robur*, 1658 [henceforth abbreviated OLD]).
- 34 "Sides with fir.' Not without reason does Vergil mention 'fir' at this juncture, then 'maple' and 'pine' shortly afterwards, for fir struck with lightning signifies the death of a mistress, and Troy was destroyed by a woman. Maple, however, is under the guardianship of Stupefaction; and when they saw the horse, the Trojans were stupefied, as for example, 'a part was stupefied by the deadly gift of unmarried Minerva' ([2.31]. But pine is under the guardianship of the mother of the gods; but it is also [representative] of deception and treachery, because they destroy her falling apples by deception: and this horse is full of treachery." (*ABIETE COSTAS non sine ratione Vergilius hoc loco abiete commemorat, item acerem et pinum paulo post; nam fulminata abies interitum dominae significat, et Troia per feminam perit. acer vero in tutela Stuporis est: et viso equo stupere Troiani, ut "pars stupeat innuptae donum exitiale Minervae"* [Aen. 2.31]. *pinus in tutela quidem est matris deum; sed et fraudum et insidiarum, quia eius poma cadentia per fraudem interimunt: et hic equus plenus insidiarum est* (on Aeneid 2.16 [T-H 1:216-17]). On pine, cf. Martial, 13.25, "Nuces pineae": *Poma sumus Cybeles: procul hinc discede, viator, / ne cadat in miserum nostra ruina caput* ("Pine nuts" or "cones": "We are Cybeles' apples: stand back a bit from here, traveler, / lest our collapse fall on your wretched head").
- 35 On 2.112, *Liber Secundus*, 69. Clearly, Austin doesn't want to do without it but doesn't want to endorse it either.
- 36 The skeleton/skin division Cooper has suggested is pure fantasy. Though they have not been exploited for this purpose, 2.230-31 and 2.260 would permit one to infer that the back and belly were oak; perhaps the legs are maple, the head fir, and the tail pine. But Professor Cooper, or any other scholar who might wish to distribute the woods over various parts of the horse, will still have to explain why Vergil decided to leave us with enough information, or with too much, to imagine nothing but a muddle.
- 37 This position is mocked by Robert Graves in his outrageous address "The Anti-Poet," calculated to knock the wind out of (if not some sense into) his Oxford audience. He recalls the unsatisfactory answers given schoolboys asking commonsense questions about the text:

"Thank you sir! Another thing we can't make out is what wood the Trojan Horse was really built of.'

"Fir, my boy. Line 16.'

"Yes, sir, it's fir in line 16, but it's maple in line 112, and oak in line 186, and pine in line 258, and oak again in line 260 . . .' [ellipsis in original].

"Yes, now I remember. But in Virgil's time a poet was licenced to use any particular sort of timber as a synonym for timber generally, even if it involved him, as here, in apparent contradictions.'

"Thank you again, sir!" (*On Poetry: Collected Tales and Essays* [Oxford, 1969], 316).

- 38 On 2.16, *The Aeneid of Virgil: Books 1-6* (Basingstoke, 1972), 218.
- 39 For a convenient introduction to the difficulties, see "Appendix. Signs of Changes of Plan in the Aeneid," in Gordon Williams, *Technique and Ideas in the Aeneid* (New Haven, 1983), 245-85. Not that it removes the problems of Vergil dying before the poem received the final revision, but the thrust of Williams's argument, as of that of others who have analyzed the problem, is that book two does not show the signs of being midway through massive reworking (as does book three); it still displays ten incomplete or hypometric hexameters (so-called "half-lines").

- 40 Vitruvius dedicates the work to Augustus and says also in the preface that he knew his "father," i.e. Julius.
- 41 *abies* (2.9.6); it contains air and fire; cf. Servius above.
- 42 After the entire discussion of timber is closed (2.9.17), Vitruvius adds as an excursus a chapter on the lowland fir as superior to the highland fir (2.9.17 and 2.10). Only once does he put fir and pine in the same heading. Explaining why columns should taper, he gives two reasons: "what is below ought to be stronger than what is above, and also, because we ought to imitate nature as seen in the case of things growing; for example, in round smooth-stemmed trees, like the fir, cypress, and pine," (*ut in arboribus teretibus, abiete, cupresso, pinu*, 5.1.3; trans. M. H. Morgan (Cambridge, Mass., 1914 [rpt. New York, 1960], 132). They are similar in belonging to smooth trees, but the fact that he lists them separately indicates that they were thought of as distinct.
- 43 On 2.112, *Liber Secundus*, 69. Indeed it is a brilliant touch. Austin has described not just a gap but a factual error. To require your audience to correct you involves them even more than merely requiring them to supplement your text. Sinon lies, or at least feigns inaccuracy, about this trifle precisely because he wants his listeners to believe the rest. But if this can be so, why not allow *robur* to be "oak"? Too obvious? Perhaps. That is, if we knew the Trojans understood him to say at one moment "maple," at another "oak" for something they knew was fir and nothing but fir (since they take pine and fir to be the same thing), then we might say the Trojans ought to have been more suspicious. But of course, perhaps we ought to have said that as soon as the Trojans heard "maple." It seems that Austin was forced into his ever-so-clever explanation of ever-so-clever Sinon only because "maple" was the single remaining discrepancy in Austin's solution of the problem. However we resolve this conundrum, by now it should be clear that the problem of the horse's wood is constructed in such a way that we must take into account not only what the speakers say, but what the listeners believe they have heard. Once again, the gaps—and in this case we must admit we can't be sure how many gaps there are, and how wide—force our attention on the listener's involvement in interpretation.
- 44 We must at least admit that this is an assumption. Yet I could play how-many-children-had-Lady-Macbeth? and set up arguments to convince you that Sinon, involved with the building of the horse, must have known more about its substance than Aeneas, who only saw it after it had been made and only briefly, in a stressful situation that rapidly got very much more stressful. And of course, some would believe me.
- 45 *Anna soror, quae me suspensam insomnia terrent! / quis novus hic nostris successit sedibus hospes, / quem sese ore ferens, quam forti pectore et armis!* (4.9–11). With Dido's *suspensam* to describe herself here, compare Aeneas's Sinon's *suspensi* of the Greeks at 2.114. The jump from one "level" to another is telling; it is precisely by means of his narration that Aeneas becomes a Sinon to Dido's Troy.
- 46 Once we read this as referring to body parts, *armis* could come from *arma* and refer to a man's weapons, i.e. his genitals, the most revealed reference being the part Dido has not yet seen but most wants to. For ancient references to genitals as weapons, one might start with the roughly contemporary *Priapea*; for the motif, Amy Richlin (*The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor* [New Haven, 1983]) compares 9.2, 11.1, 25.7, 31.3, 43.1 and 55.4. Deflated by temporary impotence, Ovid says he is "disarmed" (*inermis*, *Amores* 3.7.71); once *arma* has this overtone, we read his own mock-epic opening, *arma gravi numero violentaque bella parabam* (*Amores* 1.1.1) differently and may even think twice at *arma virumque cano*—but isn't this just what Ovid had in mind?
- 47 Livy had a particular penchant for this usage (*OLD*, s.v. 6, 1658, refers to 2.49.2, 10.14.9, 23.18.4, 28.44.5, and 30.2.1). That it isn't reported as attested in (extant) poetry in this sense before Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 14.454 is a trifle: so the first occurrence moves back 25–30 years.
- 48 However, both singular and plural may denote "the strongest, most vigorous, or most mature element of an army or other body, main strength" (*OLD*, s.v. 8).

*Peliaco quondam prognatae uertice pinus
dicuntur liquidas Neptuni nasse per undas
Phasidos ad fluctus et fines Aeeteos,
cum lecti iuuenes, Argiuae robora pubis,
auratam optantes Colchis auertere pellem
ausi sunt uada salsa cita decurrere puppi,
caerula uerrentes abiegnis aequora palmis.
diua quibus retinens in summis urbibus arces
ipsa leui fecit uolitantem flamine currum,
pineae coniungens inflexae texta carinae (64.1-10).*

The launching of the Argo was one of the major and most frequently described moments of Greek mythology, and no one familiar with Greek literature would not know the opening of Euripides' *Medea*, where the ship is pine (v. 4). Ennius alters the wood to fir: *Utinam ne in nemore Pelio securibus / Caesa accidisset abiegnata ad terram trabes* (103.208-9 in *The Tragedies of Ennius, the fragments*, ed. H. D. Jocelyn [Cambridge, 1967]; = 246-47 Vahlen). These two verses were frequently quoted in Classical literature, seven times by Cicero alone. See Jocelyn, 113-18, 350-56, esp. the learned comment on v. 209 on the question of Ennius's alteration of the traditional pine wood to fir (352-53).

- 50 Most important, *delecti uiri* in Ennius' *Medea*, in the third verse after the two quoted in the preceding note (103.212 Jocelyn = 250 Vahlen). In *Eclogue* 4, Vergil had presented cheek-by-jowl both the voyage of the Argo and the Trojan war as "types" of endeavors still to be repeated at the outset of the new age: *erit . . . altera quae uehat Argo / delectos heroas, erunt etiam altera bella, / atque iterum ad Troiam magnus mittetur Achilles* (vv. 34-36). Cf. also *Aeneid* 8.518-19: *Arcadas huic equites bis centum, robora pubis / lecta dabo, totidemque suo tibi nomine Pallas*.
- 51 Makes one also wonder whether Sinon isn't in some sense Catullus, Sinon's narrative not itself a small-scale Vergilian remake of Catullus 64, as books 1-4 of the *Aeneid* are on a larger scale.
- 52 While a truly "scientific" and "objective" approach would from the start allow for the possibility that any question is either soluble or insoluble on the information we do or could ever have, it is the way of scholarship to bypass the "whether" and move right on to the "how"; after we have devised an answer, it is not easy to return to the parting of the ways and admit that we don't have enough information. See my remarks on salvaging interpretive "investment" above.
- 53 *sunt geminae Somni portae, quarum altera fertur / cornea, qua ueris facilis datur exitus umbris, / altera candenti perfecta nitens elephanto, / sed falsa ad caelum mittunt insomnia Manes*, 6.893-96. The two gates of dreams are found again in the *Odyssey* (19.562-67). Penelope speaks of them to the disguised Odysseus. In Homer, the link between ivory and deceptive dreams and horn and fulfilled dreams seems explained by etymological play.
- 54 *praedam . . . expetendam [elephantum] sciunt solam esse in armis suis, quae Iuba cornua appellat* (*Nat. Hist.* 8.7; corrected, however, by what follows: *Herodotus tanto antiquior et consuetudo melius dentes*); also *cum arbore exacuant . . . cornua elephantum et uri, saxo rhinoceros* (*Nat. Hist.* 18.2).
- 55 Martial, *Epigrams* 1.72.4; cf. *Liber Spectaculorum* 19.3.
- 56 It is already an object of value in Homer. For example, it climaxes the progression bronze—silver—ivory Homer sets up when he describes the sheath for the silver-handled bronze sword Euryalus gives Odysseus to compose their quarrel: itself of unnamed metal, it is encircled with freshly sawn ivory (8.404-5). For a complete list of Homeric references, see W. B. Stanford on *Odyssey* 19.562ff. in *The Odyssey of Homer*, 2d ed. (London, 1958), 2:338. In Latin, Lucilius has it as a mirror or a decoration on one (683 Marx/641 Warmington) and Tibullus adorns Messalla's triumphal chariot with it (1.7.8). Horace links ivory with gold (cf. the Greek compound "chryselephantine," an adjective apparently not itself adopted in Latin) as a sign of luxury (*Odes* 1.31.6; both

gold and ivory Indian; for more parallels, see R. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace Odes I* [Oxford, 1970], on 1.31.6, 351–52). The Lucilian link of ivory and mirror is interesting, for among the many differentiae between horn and ivory is the way each responds to light: horn is duller but may be thinned to translucency, ivory is opaque and may be polished to reflectivity. On reflectivity and poetry, see my remarks in “Horace, *Odes* 3.13: ‘O fons Bandusiae,’” in *Homo Viator: Classical Essays for John Bramble*, ed. Michael Whitby, Philip Hardie and Mary Whitby (Bristol, 1987), 131–139.

- 57 Frequently with the word *elephanto*, probably less a metonymy (object from source)—for the same word denotes the large grey animal with the trunk and tusks (but of course it is that, and yet one more “poetic” gesture)—than a Greek word. In both *Georgics* 3.26 and *Aeneid* 3.464 ivory is associated with gold. Among the first objects Helenus “orders carried to [Aeneas’s] ships” are “gifts heavy with gold and carved ivory” (*dona . . . auro grauius ac secto elephanto*, 3.464).
- 58 He describes the process of composition by means of an allegory. Like a Roman general returning victorious from a campaign, he will build a temple. In it will be Caesar, by which, by a common metonymy, he means “a statue of Caesar.” However, given the fact that the temple stands for a poem, once again the literal level reveals a truer truth: Caesar will be in it. Presumably this would be a historical epic, with Caesar appearing *in propria persona*; as it happens, although Caesar appears in the *Aeneid*, another *simulacrum* of Caesar takes center stage. In *Georgics* 3, Vergil imagines bringing offerings and describes in great detail the decorations on the temple doors, which consist of gold and ivory: “On the doors I will make from gold and solid elephant the battle / of the Ganges-dwellers [i.e., the followers of Antony] and the arms of the victorious Roman / and here the Nile swelling and greatly flowing with / battle, and the rising columns with ships’ bronze [beaks]” (*in foribus pugnam ex auro solidoque elephanto / Gangaridum faciam uictorisque arma Quirini, / atque hic undantem bello magnumque fluentem / Nilum ac nauali surgentis aere columnas*, 3.26–29). I have experimented writing “elephant” for “ivory,” so that English readers may have some sense of the impact. Another effect of “elephant” is to recall, at the very moment Vergil evokes Antony’s eastern and particularly Egyptian cohort by referring to a yet more distant oriental people, the animal by which another oriental nearly brought Rome to its knees—Hannibal, in the Punic wars.
- 59 Recall that it is in his response to Odysseus himself that Achilles compares a man using rhetorical cunning to the gates of Hell. “Responding to him swift-footed Akhilleus spoke: / ‘Nobly-born son of Laertes, crafty (*πολυμήχαν*)’ Odysseus, / it is indeed needful to refute your story (*μῦθον*) quite baldly, / exactly what I think and how it will come to pass, / so that you gossips stop buzzing in my ears, each on one side. / For that man is hateful to me like the gates of Hades / who thinks one thing in his heart, but speaks another” (9.307–13). Both gates of hell here are likened to lying, not just one.