

VIRGIL AND TACITUS, *ANN.* 1.10

Among the insinuations that Tacitus bequeaths to posterity in the negative segment of his *post mortem* of Augustus (*Ann.* 1.10) is the emperor's putative role as *machinator doli* in the death of the consul Hirtius during the fighting at Mutina in the spring of 43. The historian is thinking of a focal moment in the *Aeneid* when Sinon releases his fellow Greeks from within the wooden horse. I quote *Aen.* 2.264–7. Among the heroes who descend from the animal's belly are Ulixes, Neoptolemus

et Menelaus et ipse doli fabricator Epeos.  
invadunt urbem somno vinoque sepultam;  
caeduntur vigiles, portisque patentibus omnis  
accipiunt socios atque agmina conscia iungunt.

The echo of *doli fabricator* in *machinator doli* is clear. Neither author elsewhere offers a parallel phrase.<sup>1</sup> (This is Virgil's unique usage of *fabricator*. Tacitus' only other instance of *machinator*, at *Ann.* 15.42, is non-metaphorical.) Tacitus' bow to Virgil is for a purpose. His echo appears in the second segment of a long, four-part sentence which takes us from Octavian of 44–43 B.C. (I paraphrase the historian) stirring up veterans in his lust for rule, preparing an army though a private citizen and an *adulescens* at that, and corrupting the legions of a consul, to the actions at Mutina, to (again I paraphrase) the extortion of the consulship from an unwilling senate and, finally, to the subsequent proscriptions and land divisions. The segment on Mutina runs as follows:

... mox ubi decreto patrum fascis et ius praetoris invaserit, caesis Hirtio et Pansa, sive hostis illos, seu Pansam venenum vulnere adfusum, sui milites Hirtium et machinator doli Caesar abstulerunt, utriusque copias occupavisse.

Tacitus has reversed Virgil's order. Aeneas' Trojan narrative takes us from Epeos, *doli fabricator*, to the Greeks entering the city (*invadunt urbem*) to the killing of the guards (*caeduntur vigiles*).<sup>2</sup> Tacitus' climax comes with the naming of Caesar, *machinator doli*, only after the future *princeps* has already 'invaded' (*invaserit*) the emblems and rights of praetor and after Hirtius and Pansa have been killed (*caesis*). Nevertheless each author gives special emphasis to these instances of *invado* and *caedo*, with Tacitus using in juxtaposition words to which Virgil had given separate stress by placing them at the commencement of adjacent lines (and of new sense

<sup>1</sup> The parallel phraseology is noted by H. Schmaus (*Tacitus: ein Nachahmer Vergils*: diss. Erlangen [Bamberg, 1887], 16), in his enumeration of Tacitus' borrowings from Virgil, though no later commentator cites the connection. It does not appear in the lists of Tacitus' major Virgilian borrowings given by A. Draeger (*Über Syntax und Stil des Tacitus* [Leipzig, 1882], pp. 127–9) or H. Furneaux (*The Annals of Tacitus*)<sup>2</sup> [Oxford, 1896], p. 74). F. R. D. Goodyear (ed., *The Annals of Tacitus*: I [Cambridge, 1972]) ad loc., referring to Sen. *Tro.* 750 (*o machinator fraudis et scelerum artifex*) observes: 'So many prototypes of villainy are familiar in Latin literature that it is doubtful whether T. had any particular one in mind when he wrote this phrase'. My suggestion here is that literary allusion may help us find a candidate.

The two most recent essays dealing with Virgilian influence on Tacitus, by R. T. S. Baxter ('Virgil's Influence on Tacitus in Books 1 and 2 of the Annals', *CP* 67 [1972], 246–69) and J. Bews ('Virgil, Tacitus, Tiberius and Germanicus', *PVS* 12 [1972–3], 35–48) look particularly, in the case of Baxter, to the historian's treatment of Germanicus, and, in that of Bews, as her title implies, of Tiberius as well. Among the historian's critics only Norma P. Miller ('Style and Content in Tacitus', in *Tacitus*, ed. T. A. Dorey [London, 1969], p. 105) apprehends that Tacitus' allusion to *Aeneid* 2 through the phrase *machinator doli* 'connects him [Augustus] with the inventor of that classic piece of deception, the Trojan Horse ...' This note confirms her contention.

<sup>2</sup> It may not be accidental that the verb *acceperit* follows shortly in Tacitus' sentence.

units). In the cases of *invaserit* and *machinator* Tacitus has also turned what was literal in Virgil into metaphor.

Tacitus is also following a larger Virgilian narrative line. Hitherto in *Aeneid* 2 we have had the elaboration of the *dolus* itself – the pretence of the horse to be what it is not (*votum pro reditu simulant*, 17) and the brilliant rhetorical stratagem of Sinon who with consummate guile can, in order, free himself, open the gates of the city to the mendacious *monstrum*, and liberate Epeos, its crafter, and his colleagues from its womb.<sup>3</sup> Only then can the city be invaded, with ruinous consequences. Tacitus' sentence, and Octavian's career, follow a similar progress. Both begin with subterfuge:

pietatem erga parentem et tempora rei publicae obtentui sumpta ... simulatam Pompeianarum gratiam partium; ...

And only after this deceit has worked its magic can Octavian, as he contrives his ascent to unique power, play the metaphorical role of an attacking army, 'invading' the rights of praetor and then 'occupying' the forces of consuls, one of whom, it is implied, he did to death. In each author emphasis on the cunning behind this necessary deception comes at a crucial moment of transition when, in the case of Octavian, disguise is lifted and latent greed for power more fully revealed. Through Tacitus' Virgilian allusion Octavian emerges as at once a Sinon and an Epeos, first insinuating his nefarious way into Roman institutions and then bringing more into the open his attack on the doomed republic.

It may not be accidental that Tacitus' next sentence contains an apophthegm worthy of attention by those pondering Aeneas at the end of his epic, *ira terribilis* in the face of Turnus' plea – his last words – for an end to hatred: *ulterius ne tende odiis* (*Aen.* 12.938). In the case of Octavian both deceit (*sed Pompeium imagine pacis, sed Lepidum specie amicitiae deceptos*) and hatred (*sane Cassii et Brutorum exitus paternis inimiciis datos*) continue. The latter abstraction would seem to help motivate Aeneas too, *furiis accensus* as he kills, spurning Turnus' prayer. On Octavian's continuing hatred Tacitus comments: ...*fas sit privata odia publicis utilitatibus remittere*. I do not consider it impossible, given his sympathetic, skilful adoption of Virgil in the preceding phrases, for Rome's greatest historian to have made this further, final leap toward a judgemental reading of the *Aeneid*'s final moment.

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<sup>3</sup> There are other notable instances where the phraseology of *Aeneid* 2 stayed with Tacitus as he wrote. Elsewhere, for example, he draws from Virgil's description of the wooden horse, *instar montis* (*Aen.* 2.15; re. *Ann.* 2.61), and of the spectre of death that looms over Troy's final night (*mortis imago*: *Aen.* 2.369, *Ann.* 15.70).

### MANILIUS 1.88

Manilius begins his first book with a brief summary of the early history of astronomy, leading to a sketch of the rise of civilization. In the following passage, printed as it is found in one of the principal manuscripts *M*, he describes the invention of language, agriculture and navigation:

1.85                    tunc et lingua suas accepit barbara leges,  
                             et fera diuersis exercita frugibus arua,  
                             et uagus in caecum penetrauit nauita pontum,  
                             fecit et ignotis inter commercia terris.

88 itiner *GLN<sup>mg</sup> V*: iter *N*: iter in *Gron.*: linter *Hous.*