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VIRGIL'S SIBYL AND THE 'MANY MOUTHS' CLICHÉ (*AEN.* 6.625–7)

The Sibyl of Cumae is a notoriously enigmatic figure, first pagan, then Christian, wise and deranged, clairvoyant but obscure. Her prophecies—scratched on volatile leaves, boomed through cave-openings, recorded for deciphering in hidden books—are riddles that can be read in two directions and interpreted in at least two ways.[1] Her biographical details are in question (which Cumae? Campanian or Aeolian? which name? Herophile? Amalthea? Deiphobe or Demophile?).[2] She is of disputed parentage, uncertain age, and ambiguous sexual experience. Virgil makes her a blend of three different Sibyls—Cumaean, Cimmerian, and Trojan—and gives her a double role: prophetess of Apollo (and forecaster of Aeneas' future) and priestess of

[1] H. W. Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity* (London, 1988), 71 99 on the Sibyl of Cumae; D. S. Potter, 'Sibyls in the Greek and Roman world', *JRA* 3 (1990), 471 83. Sibylline oracles: J. H. Gauger (ed.), *Sibyllinische Weissagungen. Griechisch deutsch* (Düsseldorf and Zürich, 1998); Parke, 1 22; J. Geffcken, *Komposition und Entstehungszeit der Oracula Sibyllina* (Leipzig, 1902); H. Diels, *Sibyllinische Blätter* (Berlin, 1916); R. Bloch, 'L'Origine des Livres Sibyllins à Rome', in E. C. Welskopf (ed.), *Neue Beiträge zur Geschichte der Alten Welt* (Berlin, 1965), 281 92; H. Cancik, '*Libri fatales*', in D. Hellholm (ed.), *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12 17, 1979* (Tübingen, 1983), 549 76; D. Potter, *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire: A Historical Commentary on the Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle* (Oxford, 1990); *Enciclopedia Virgiliana*, svv. 'Sibilla' and 'Sibillini, Libri'. I have not been able to see I. Chiarassi Colombo and T. Sepilli (edd.), *Sibille e linguaggi oracolari: mito storia tradizione. Atti del convegno Macerata Norcia, settembre 1994* (Pisa, 1998). For the Cumaean Sibyl's words as exceptionally inaccessible: Lactant. *Div. Inst.* 1.6 *cuius libri a Romanis occultantur nec eos ab ullo nisi a quindecimuiris inspici fas habent.* For acrostics as a feature of Sibylline oracles, see Cic. *Div.* 2.211, Dion. Hal. 4.62. Varro's list of ten Sibyls: Lactant. *Div. Inst.* 1.6. On the Cumaean Sibyl's cave: Lycoph. *Alex.* 1277, Paus. 10.12.8.

[2] On the Sibyl's name, see Parke (n. 1), *passim*; J. H. Waszink, 'Virgil and the Sibyl of Cumae', *Mnemos.* 1 (1948), 43 58, at 54. On the Sibyl of Cyme in Aeolis, see Parke, 88. On Virgil's Sibyl, see also R. Merkelbach, 'Aeneas in Cumae', *MH* 19 (1961), 83 99; J. B. Garstang, 'Aeneas and the Sibyls', *CJ* 59 (1963), 97 101; R. J. Quiter, *Aeneas und die Sibylle. Die rituellen Motive im sechsten Buch der Aeneis* (Königstein, 1984). Other literary Sibyls: Naevius, fr. 11 Morel Büchner = fr. 12 Strezelecki, with E. Flores, 'La Sibilla Cimmeria in Nevio', in G. Cerri (ed.), *Scrivere e recitare. Modelli di trasmissione del testo poetico nell'antichità e nel medioevo* (Rome, 1986), 127 45; Tib. 2.5 (where the poet/prophet equivalence works especially well for Tibullus/Sibulla), with F. Cairns, *Tibullus: A Hellenistic Poet at Rome* (Cambridge, 1979), 66; R. Maltby, *Tibullus: Elegies. Text, Introduction and Commentary* (Cambridge, 2002), ad loc.; Ov. *Met.* 14.103 56, with G. K. Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses: An Introduction to the Basic Aspects* (Oxford, 1975), 226 9; J. D. Ellsworth, 'The episode of the Sibyl in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (14.103 56)', in R. L. Hadich and J. D. Ellsworth (edd.), *East Meets West. Homage to Edgar C. Knowlton* (Honolulu, 1988), 47 55; Petron. *Sat.* 48.8, with H. Bacon, 'The Sibyl in the bottle', *Virginia Quarterly Review* 34 (1958), 262 76; H. D. Cameron, 'The Sibyl in the *Satyricon*', *CJ* 65 (1970), 337 9; Sil. 13.488 895, with G. W. Most, 'Il poeta nell'Ade: catabasi epica e teoria dell'epos tra Omero e Virgilio', *SIFC* 10 (1992), 1014 26, at 1024 5; Stat. *Silv.* 4.3.114 63, with K. Coleman, *Statius Silvae IV* (Oxford, 1988), ad loc.; C. Newlands, *Statius' Silvae and the Poetics of Empire* (Cambridge, 2002), 309 23. On *Eclogue* 4, see R. G. M. Nisbet, 'Vergil's Fourth *Eclogue*: easterners and westerners', *BICS* 25 (1978), 59 78.

Hecate (and Aeneas' Underworld guide).[3] Her voice, as Ovid predicted, has outlived her: Virgil's Sibyl becomes Dante's Virgil; Petronius' bottled fairy with a death wish speaks unforgettably of Neronian and twentieth-century malaise.[4] Nothing a Sibyl says ought ever to be a straightforward cliché, yet for centuries Virgil's Sibyl of Cumae has got away with using one at a climactic moment in her Underworld tour.

After describing a selection of the torments in Tartarus, the Sibyl breaks off and tells Aeneas she can go no further in cataloguing the crimes and punishments she has witnessed. 'If I had a hundred tongues and a hundred mouths and an iron voice, I could not take in every form of crime or go through every punishment by name':

> non, mihi si linguae centum sint oraque centum,
> ferrea uox, omnis scelerum comprendere formas,
> omnia poenarum percurrere nomina possim. (6.625–7)

This should be a hyperbolic finale, and yet Virgil is taking a risk with experienced readers of epic. 'This is what poets [or prophet(esse)s] always say', yawns the satirist Persius, 'asking for a hundred voices and mouths and tongues for their poems' (*Sat.* 5.1–2 *uatibus hic mos est, centum sibi poscere uoces,/centum ora et linguas optare in carmina centum*). By his time the Homeric 'many mouths' topos—*adynaton*, indicator of inexpressible scale or numbers, and statement of heroic *aporia* rolled into one—had become a very tired expression. There is every reason to suppose that it was one in Virgil's time too. In that case, shouldn't it be odd that the Sibyl, who, as Persius' ambiguous *uatibus* suggests, is a plausible surrogate for Virgil himself, ends with what sounds like a leaden anticlimax? Apparently not, since her use of the age-old formula has never been criticized.[5] I will take a roundabout approach to this problem of my own making: first convicting Virgil's most mysterious speaker of flagrant unoriginality, then arguing that she and Virgil can be defended on the grounds that they are being unusually original.

At least four Latin poets had previously adapted the Greek prototype of the 'many mouths' expression, used to mark Homer's division at *Il.* 2.488–93 of the catalogue of Greek forces into (numerable) leaders and (innumerable) multitude:[6]

> πληθὺν δ' οὐκ ἂν ἐγὼ μυθήσομαι οὐδ' ὀνομήνω,
> οὐδ' εἴ μοι δέκα μὲν γλῶσσαι, δέκα δὲ στόματ' εἶεν,
> φωνὴ δ' ἄρρηκτος, χάλκεον δέ μοι ἦτορ ἐνείη,
> εἰ μὴ Ὀλυμπιάδες Μοῦσαι, Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο

[3] Waszink (n. 2).

[4] Virgil and his Sibyl merge already in an anecdote about Clodius Albinus (*SHA Clod.* 5.3) visiting Cumae and receiving a *sors Virgiliana*. The Sibyl in Dante: J. T. Schnapp, *The Transfiguration of History at the Center of Dante's Paradise* (Princeton, 1986), 130–49. The Sibyl in *The Waste Land*: G. L. Schmeling and D. R. Rebmann, 'T. S. Eliot and Petronius', *CLS* 12 (1975), 393–410. Christine de Pizan reverts to having the Sibyl as her guide in *The Path of Long Study*. I have not seen M. Dolç, 'Supervivencia de un mito virgiliano, la Sibila', in H. F. Bauza (ed.), *Virgilio en el bimilenario de su muerte* (Buenos Aires, 1982), 25–37.

[5] R. G. Austin (ed.), *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos liber sextus* (Oxford, 1977), ad loc., calls it 'a rhetorical flourish'; E. Norden (ed.), *P. Vergilius Maro Aeneis Buch VI* (Stuttgart, 1981[7]), ad loc., notes alliteration, anaphora, and parison.

[6] On Homer's appeal, → W. W. Minton, 'Homer's invocations of the Muses: traditional patterns', *TAPA* 91 (1960), 292–3 → id., 'Invocation and catalogue in Homer and Hesiod', *TAPA* 93 (1962), 188–212. See also A. Ford, *Homer: The Poetry of the Past* (Ithaca, NY, 1992), 72–89, for a subtle discussion of Homeric moments of *recusatio* as 'crises of selection' which are also gestures towards the epic sublime.

θυγατέρες, μνησαίαθ' ὅσοι ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθον·
ἀρχοὺς αὖ νηῶν ἐρέω νῆάς τε προπάσας.

Ennius', Hostius', and Lucretius' (or Lucilius') versions survive only as isolated fragments in ancient commentaries. Minor changes can be detected: Ennius' ideal heart was composed of iron, not bronze; Hostius upped Homer's ten mouths and tongues to a hundred and changed the voices to 'clear' ones (*liquatae*); Lucretius/Lucilius combined a hundred tongues and mouths with a bronze voice.[7]

The fourth poet was Virgil himself, who had already used the core of the expression in the *Georgics*:

> non ego cuncta meis amplecti uersibus opto,
> non, mihi si linguae centum sint oraque centum,
> ferrea uox. (2.42 4)

Here we have the first surrounding context for the topos in Latin poetry, and it is a disconcerting one. Addressing Maecenas, the poet tells him that he would need a hundred tongues and mouths and an iron voice to be capable of describing all the different branches of arboriculture. Farrell, noting that Virgil combines the maximum number of tongues and mouths with the premium grade of metal-plating in order to strain at this relatively mundane subject, pronounces the passage 'one of the most broadly humorous in the *Georgics*'.[8] Thomas observes that Virgil relaxes the idea of incapacity into preference (not *non possim* but *non cuncta ... amplecti ... opto*)—a way of defining selective didactic against (potentially) exhaustive epic.[9] By applying the Homeric expression to something so obviously unheroic, Virgil seemed already to be registering that it was a cliché unusable in a normal context. Yet he went on to insert it without obvious qualms at the end of the Sibyl's speech, and when Farrell considers the *Aeneid* passage he is comparatively unconcerned, deeming the punishments of Tartarus 'a serious, august, even frightening context', on a par with Greek armies. Gone astray in the *Georgics*, the motif is back 'at home' here.[10]

Hinds also seems unworried by the Sibyl when he takes the Latin versions of 'many mouths', this brick wall of a topos, as an opportunity for an impressive display of what

[7] Enn. *Ann.* 469 70 Skutsch (= schol. *G.* 2.43): *non si, lingua loqui saperet quibus, ora decem sint/in me, tum ferro cor sit pectusque reuinctum*; Hostius fr. 3 Morel Büchner = fr. 3 Courtney, *apud* Macrob. *Sat.* 6.3.6: *non si mihi linguae/centum atque ora sient totidem uoc esque liquatae*; Lucretius fr. 1 Martin, *apud* Serv. *ad G.* 242 (on the common scribal confusion between 'lucretius' and 'lucilius', see M. Wigodsky, *Vergil and Early Latin Poetry* [Wiesbaden, 1972], 98 9; J. Farrell, *Vergil's Georgics and The Traditions of Ancient Epic: the Art of Allusion in Literary History* [Oxford, 1991], 232, n. 57). On the history of the motif, see P. Courcelle, 'Histoire du cliché virgilien des cent bouches (*Georg.* II, 42 44 = *Aen.* VI, 625 627)', *REL* 33 (1955), 231 8 (with many late antique examples, including the *reductio ad absurdum* of the topos: John of Salisbury's appeal for a hundred mouths to describe a list of *nugae*); G. Pascucci, 'Enn. *Ann.* 56 562V2 e un tipico procedimento di αὐξήσις nella poesia latina', *SIFC* 31 (1959), 79 99; R. Häussler, *Das historische Epos der Griechen und Römer bis Vergil* (Heidelberg, 1976), 322 3; O. Skutsch (ed.), *The Annals of Ennius* (Oxford, 1985), 628 9. Other examples before Virgil: Caecil. 126, Plaut. *Bacch.* 128. Later examples: Ov. *Ars Am.* 1.435 6, *Fast.* 2.119 20, *Met.* 8. 533 4, Sil. 4.525 6, Val. Flacc. 6.36 7, Apul. *Met.* 11.25.

[8] Farrell (n. 7), 233.

[9] R. F. Thomas, *Vergil, Georgics* (Cambridge, 1988), vol. 2, ad loc. C. Day Lewis, *The Georgics of Virgil* (London, 1940), translates: 'I cannot hope to include everything in my poem.'

[10] Farrell (n. 7), 233.

gives when one applies a little interpretative 'pressure'.[11] The deadest of poetic clichés could, it turns out, go on having life kicked into it, either by competitive upgrading of its various elements or by being placed in revitalizing contexts. Ovid, for example, uses it at *Tr.* 1.5.53–6 for generic definition:

> si uox infragilis, pectus mihi firmius aere,
> pluraque cum linguis pluribus ora forent:
> non tamen idcirco complecterer omnia uerbis,
> materia uires exsuperante meas.

Here the elegiac context only increases the usual gulf between the poet's brittle voice (the elegiac *uox* really *is fragilis*) and the enormous subject he cannot represent (here personal misery, but paradoxically of the kind that outdoes epic misery). The meaningless multiplication of mouths and tongues is reduced to a hopeless *plura . . . pluribus*. Even Persius, after saying nothing more can be done with the expression, twists it by putting it into the service of 'alimentary' satire, picturing the hundred mouths and tongues as digestive rather than vocal organs, which irreverently regurgitate 'gobbets' (*offas*) of tragic poetry.[12] Hinds demonstrates triumphantly that the cliché is almost never 'inert', but continually mobile, indeed perfectly expressive of the gathering momentum and proliferation of multiple poetic voices.[13] However, the fact that he does not focus on the *Aeneid* passage suggests that he, like Farrell, regards it as relatively stable, and Ovid and Persius, outside the epic context, as more creative than Virgil inside it.

There are in fact several ways in which Virgil's risky feeding of his own tarnished cliché back into epic might be regarded as an imaginative, even humorous reworking. For a start, as Farrell notes, Virgil does not put it back in the obvious place, which would have been before the Catalogue of Italian Forces in *Aeneid* 7 (641–817), his epic's gesture to Homer's Catalogue of Ships.[14] He follows Homer to the extent of calling on the Muses to recall and remember (7.645 *et meministis enim, diuae, et memorare potestis*; cf. *Il.* 2.492), but goes on to contrast them with a poet so removed in time from his subject-matter that his information hangs by the merest thread, the thinnest breeze of rumour (7.446 *ad nos uix tenuis famae perlabitur aura*).[15] It could be argued that a 'many mouths' formula would not have been

[11] S. Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (Cambridge, 1998), 34 47, 94 5 (the Sibyl is mentioned at 35 and 45). E. Finkelpearl, *Metamorphosis of Language in Apuleius: A Study of Allusion in the Novel* (Ann Arbor, 1998), 196 9 discusses the motif in the context of Lucius' appeal (*Met.* 11.25) for one thousand mouths and tongues to supply the *uocis ubertas* necessary to describe the multiplicity of Isis. She detects a mixture of humility and arrogance in the motif, and also an element of decline, with each generation consciously demanding more strength to emulate Homer. As John Henderson points out to me, there is also a 'pentecostal' aspect to the motif in the context of spreading a new faith using many voices.

[12] Pers. *Sat.* 5.5. See D. M. Hooley, *The Knotted Thong: Structures of Mimesis in Persius* (Ann Arbor, 1997), 68 80, 119 21 on repetition of *centum/centurionem/centusse* in *Sat.* 5 and on Persius' transformation of the cliché into a figure for the plurality of voices in his own poetry: 'not megaphonic . . . but composite' (77).

[13] John Henderson suggests to me that 'many mouths' is so persistent because it represents the 'exponential polyphony of intertextuality'. See also Hooley (n. 12).

[14] Farrell (n. 7), 233.

[15] *Aen.* 7.641 6: *pandite nunc Helicona, deae, cantusque mouete,/qui bello exciti reges, quae quemque secutae/complerint campos acies, quibus Itala iam tum/floruerit terra alma uiris, quibus arserit armis;/et meministis enim, diuae, et memorare potestis;/ad nos uix tenuis famae perlabitur aura.* Cf. N. Horsfall (ed.), *Virgil, Aeneid 7: A Commentary* (Brill, 2000), 422: Virgil 'laments . . . the inadequacy of his source material'.

appropriate here anyway: Virgil is not describing vast multitudes, nor is he making a distinction between leaders and troops. His aims are rather different: to assemble a wide range of Italian leaders, in order to prove that even most Italians are foreigners if you go far enough back, and to testify to links between modern Roman *gentes* and rugged Italian tribesmen. In other words, his chief interest is in lines of transmission between the misty past and the present. He may in fact be hinting, through his allusion to the *tenuis aura*, that this Italian 'Gathering of the Clans' is little more than an antiquarian's fantasy, something as bogus, for example, as the Scots' invention of tartan in the eighteenth century.[16] This despite the fact that Virgil's style of poetic 'remembering' in this book simulates the wafted-down oral heritage of its various old story-tellers.[17]

So it comes about, then, that the Sibyl, and not the poet himself, is the chosen speaker of the cliché in Virgil's epic, and this, as far as we know, makes her unique among those who utter it in ancient literature. The Sibyl is central to *Aeneid* 6 as prophetess and guide, the go-between who initiates Aeneas into the mysteries of the Underworld.[18] It seems that Virgil invented her encounter with Aeneas, removing her from Tarquin's time and conflating three different Sibyls in order to blend topical events (Augustus' restoration of the cave and temple at Cumae and the installation of the Sibylline books in Apollo's temple on the Palatine in 28 B.C.), local oracles of the dead (the Cimmerian Sibyl visited by Naevius' Aeneas was based at Lake Avernus) and the *fata Aeneae* (as predicted by Tibullus' Trojan Sibyl and, according to another tradition, Cassandra).[19] She is the fabled opposite of a direct speaker, a specialist in spine-tingling, ambiguous pronouncements and true words muffled in obscurity (99–100 *horrendas ... ambages .../obscuris uera inuoluens*), one who pours out frenzied rants, then just as unpredictably clams up (102 *rabida ora quierunt*, 155 *pressoque obmutuit ore*). Forewarned by Helenus, Aeneas at least manages to prevent her from using her second style of prophecy, writing verses on leaves liable to be disturbed by the merest gust of wind (3.441–62, which Fowler has read as an internal image of out-of-order Virgilian narrative and its arbitrary interpretation[20]). Her riddles are the verbal equivalent of the winding labyrinth pictured at the start of Book 6 (also 29 *ambages*).[21] There are

[16] Cf. the title of W. Warde Fowler's monograph on the Catalogue, *Virgil's 'Gathering of the Clans'. Being Observations on Aeneid VII. 601 817* (Oxford, 1918[2]; repr. New York, 1978).

[17] For example, 7.205 6 (Latinus) *atque equidem memini (fama est obscurior annis)/ Auruncos ita ferre senes*, 7.564 (Amsanctus) *nobilis et fama multis memoratus in oris.*

[18] Quiter (n. 2), 49 56 ('Die Sibylle als Mystagogin') draws enlightening parallels with the language of Apuleius' Isis-book (*Met.* 11). Most (n. 2), 1022 calls the Sibyl 'un ibrido tra poeta ispirato, ricercatore storico-letterario, e cicerone turistico'.

[19] Waszink (n. 2) usefully untwists the various strands, though he concludes by underplaying the Sibyl's importance in Book 6. See Lycoph. *Alex.* 1273 80, where Cassandra predicts Aeneas' future.

[20] D. Fowler, 'Virgilian narrative (a) story-telling', in C. Martindale (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil* (Cambridge, 1997), 268 9; cf. D. Hershkowitz, *The Madness of Epic: Reading Insanity from Homer to Statius* (Oxford, 1998), 105, n. 121. E. Spentzou, 'Introduction: secularizing the muse', in E. Spentzou and D. Fowler (edd.), *Cultivating the Muse: Struggles for Power and Inspiration in Classical Literature* (Oxford, 2002), 18 19 sees evidence here of a possible feminine, sibylline version of history which Virgil has suppressed.

[21] R. C. Monti, 'The identification of Vergil's cave of the Cumaean Sibyl in *Aeneid* 6', *Vergilius* 40 (1994), 19 34, at 32 3; R. Armstrong, 'Crete in the *Aeneid*: recurring trauma and alternative fate', *CQ* 52 (2002), 321 40, at 338. On the labyrinth as a central image in Book 6, see W. Fitzgerald, 'Aeneas, Daedalus, and the labyrinth', *Arethusa* 17 (1984), 51 65; P. R. Doob, *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages*

parallels, too, between her style of speech and the journey through the Underworld. Aeneas and his companion go darkly through unknown space (268 *ibant obscuri*). A split path between Tartarus and the Elysian fields (540 *partis ubi se uia findit in ambas*) looks like the topographical version of oracular *ambages*. So do the Sibyl's either–or alternatives along the way: twisted Heraclitus (126–9 *facilis descensus Auerno/.../sed reuocare gradum .../hoc opus, hic labor est*), the open-and-shut sesame of the Golden Bough (146–8 *namque ipse uolens facilisque sequetur,/si te fata uocant; aliter non uiribus ullis/uincere nec duro poteris conuellere ferro*) or the double bind of the Gates of Sleep (893–6 *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*).

This all suggests that we might regard sibylline speech and movements as extreme examples of the many entangling plot devices that delay Aeneas on the path towards his destination.[22] And yet the Sibyl has a striking opposite tendency to cut long journeys short.[23] She is a severe and brisk guide, hurrying Aeneas on before he has time to take in all the paintings on Apollo's temple doors (37 *'non hoc ista sibi tempus spectacula poscit'*)—prompting suspicions about just what it was that Aeneas was not allowed to see.[24] When dawn comes, she moves him on again (539 *nox ruit, Aenea; nos flendo ducimus horas*). After the pause outside Tartarus she pushes ahead to the Elysian Fields: 629–30 *'sed iam age, carpe uiam et susceptum perfice munus;/acceleremus.'* Her replies are correspondingly laconic, in the manner of sibylline oracles: 321 *olli sic breuiter fata est longaeua sacerdos*, 398 *breuiter fata est Amphrysia uates*, 538 *breuiterque adfata Sibylla est.* With all this, we might be tempted to ask: what's the great hurry? This Sibyl should have all the time in the world: the epithet *longaeua* (321, 628) may allude to the story retold by Ovid in which Apollo, spurned as her suitor, grants her long life without long youth, causing her to wither away and later merge into Petronius' leaf-like creature in the bottle who wants to die.[25] When Aeneas catches up with her in Ovid's 'little *Aeneid*', she has lived seven hundred years and has three hundred to go: *Met.* 14.145–6 *superest .../ter centum messes, ter centum musta uidere.*[26]

Apart from the need to complete the journey by daylight, there is a plausible narratological reason for the Sibyl's haste: Virgil is condensing a vast body of

(Ithaca, NY, 1990), esp. 25–37, 227–53; P. A. Miller, 'The Minotaur within: fire, the labyrinth, and strategies of containment in *Aeneid* 5 and 6', *CP* 90 (1995), 225–40; B. Catto, 'The labyrinth on the Cumaean Gates and Aeneas' escape from Troy', *Vergilius* 34 (1998), 71–6. On the labyrinth in mystery religions: Quiter (n. 2), 44–8.

[22] On plot diversions in the *Aeneid*, see D. Quint, *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton, 1993), 51–96.

[23] A. Feldherr, 'Putting Dido on the map: genre and geography in Vergil's Underworld', *Arethusa* 32 (1999), 85–122, at 93: 'the figure who keeps Aeneas from being side tracked, delayed or distracted'. Armstrong (n. 21), 337 calls the Sibyl 'an adherent of the linear school of history', but also remarks that her prophecy to Aeneas contains 'a strange mixture of certainty about the future and the inevitability of repetition'.

[24] S. Casali, 'Aeneas and the doors of the Temple of Apollo', *CJ* 91 (1995), 1–9.

[25] Ov. *Met.* 14.101–53, Petron. *Sat.* 48.8. For the Sibyl's proverbial longevity, cf. Prop. 2.2.15, 2.24.3, Ov. *Fast.* 3.531, Mart. 9.29.3.

[26] Three hundred years from Aeneas would put the Sibyl's death in the reign of Tarquin (timed with her last historical appearance: see below, n. 59); see M. Haupt, R. Ehwald, and M. von Albrecht (edd.), *P. Ovidius Naso: Metamorphosen* 2 (Zurich, 1966[5]), 365. But is this also a doom laden prophecy for the city of Rome, seven centuries old at the time Ovid was writing? The Sibyl's thousand year life span coincides with the number of years souls wait for reincarnation at *Aen.* 6.748.

Underworld lore that has been subject to many literary treatments before him. Much of the mythological scenery is already familiar from Homer's *Nekuia*, Hesiod's *Theogony*, Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Plato's *Phaedo* and *Republic* 10, and Lucretius' sceptical picture in *De Rerum Natura* 3.[27] This information has to be pared down in order to make room for Aeneas' significant encounters with ghosts from his past and the overlaid moral and philosophical part of Virgilian eschatology: Anchises' speech on the transmigration of souls and the parade of future Roman heroes. The Sibyl, as surrogate guide, signals and exaggerates her author's manoeuvres. Her style of exegesis, half suggestive and half brisk, makes the tour of the Underworld literally an extended *praeteritio*, one that opens up tantalizing half-glimpses and closes off potential vistas. The same conflicting impulses—to reveal something unspeakable and normally hidden and then to hide it again prematurely—determine the strangely telescoped quality of Virgil's wider narrative.

From the beginning of the book, both apocalyptic prophecy and the yawning but mysterious landscape of the Underworld provide models for narrative alternation between revealing and concealing. Apollo is said to open up the future (12 *aperit ... futura*), yet the Sibyl wraps her truths in darkness (100 *obscuris uera inuoluens*). Daedalus once unpuzzled the labyrinth (27 *inextricabilis error*, 29 *ambages ... resoluit*), but it is nearly impossible to return from Avernus (128–9 *reuocare gradum superasque euadere ad auras,/hoc opus, hic labor est*) and no traveller crosses back over the river Styx (425 *inremeabilis undae*). Features of the Underworld once closed (141 *telluris operta*) are laid open and stretched out to view (81 *ostia ... patuere*, 127 *patet atri ianua Ditis*, 262 *antro aperto*, 406 *aperit ramum qui ueste latebat*, 574 *panduntur portae*, 577–8 *Tartarus .../... patet*), and yet Aeneas for the most part wanders in a maze or a dark wood (138–9 *hunc tegit omnis/lucus et obscuris claudunt conuallibus umbrae*, 633 *per opaca uiarum*) filled with dead-end uncertainties (157–8 *caecos .../euentus*) and shadowy recognition-scenes (340 *uix multa ... cognouit in umbra*, 452–3 *agnouitque per umbras/obscuram*).[28] As Virgil's invocation of this book's Muses, the Underworld gods, suggests, his narrative is consciously pitched at the level of partial revelation and framed as a half-initiation into forbidden mysteries.[29] It is to be a secondary account relying on 'hearsay' from earlier speakers, which exposes hidden things not altogether stripped of their surrounding mist:

> sit mihi fas audita loqui, sit numine uestro
> pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas. (266–7)

Virgil's request (coming straight after Aeneas' heroic girding for his journey: 261 *nunc animis opus, Aenea, nunc pectore firmo*[30]) anticipates the Sibyl's aporetic 'many mouths' statement; it is roughly equivalent in meaning, but vaguer and more

[27] For Virgil's sources, see L. Radermacher, 'Motiv und Personlichkeit II: Die Busser Vergils', *RhM* 63 (1908), 531–4; A. K. Michels, 'Lucretius and the sixth book of the *Aeneid*', *AJP* 65 (1944), 141–4; Wigodsky (n. 7), 132–9; F. Graf, *Eleusis und die orphische Dichtung in vorhellenistischer Zeit* (Berlin, 1974), 144–6 (on similar elements in Ar. *Frogs* and *Aen.* 6), 79–94 (other influences); G. N. Knauer, *Die Aeneis und Homer* (Göttingen, 1964), 107–47; Norden (n. 5), 3–48; R. J. Clark, *Catabasis: Vergil and the Wisdom tradition* (Amsterdam, 1978).

[28] On half revelation in *Aeneid* 6, see R. A. Brooks, '*Discolor aura*: reflections on the Golden Bough', *AJP* 74 (1953), 260–80.

[29] On Virgil's use of the language of initiation, see Quiter (n. 2), 85–91; J. E. G. Zetzel, '*Romane memento*: justice and judgment in *Aeneid* 6', *TAPA* 119 (1989), 363–84, at 377.

[30] Compare Ovid's lack of a *pectus firmius aere* at *Trist.* 1.5.53 (see above p. 173).

optimistic. The question remains: why does Virgil go on to delegate the familiar epic topos to his more daunted understudy?

One explanation might lie in the intermediary character of the Sibyl herself. If, as Most has suggested, every poetic catabasis can be read as an act of homage to one's poetic ancestors (in Homer's case, dead characters span pre-Homeric epic and the plot of his own *Odyssey*; in Silius' case, they embrace Homer and Virgil simultaneously), then Virgil's Hell is especially 'belated'.[31] Both geographically and morally more coherent than Homer's (at 6.119–24 earlier visitors, such as Orpheus, Theseus, and Hercules, provide foils for Aeneas' stainless descent), it is also more obviously metapoetic (with its separate sections housing poets and epic warriors), openly acknowledging that its different literary influences are siphoned through tributary channels (with *audita loqui* an 'oral' gesture to Virgil's epic sources, both Homeric and Roman).[32] The Sibyl, as trainee hierophant and vessel of Apolline inspiration, is similarly a halfway figure, who allows the poet to dramatize the self-consciously 'mediated' quality of Virgilian catabasis in a way that is itself twice removed. It is not so surprising, then, that she is the chosen mouthpiece for a cliché that places its speaker so firmly within the epic tradition while proclaiming its own inadequate and derivative nature.

The open–shut, 'apocalypse later' quality of the underworld tour reaches a climax in the Sibyl's description of Tartarus, its most unspeakable region, and an invisible one too. Tartarus is a miniature version of Virgil's Underworld as a whole in that it uneasily tacks traditional mythological elements (here Ixion, Sisyphus, and Tityus) together with specifically Roman historical ones onto a moralizing philosophical framework indebted to Orphic–Pythagorean texts.[33] It is also the most forbidden and polluted place of all: as the Sibyl says at 563, *nulli fas casto sceleratum insistere limen.* Even Aeneas, like the profane visitors shooed from the threshold of Hades (258 '*procul, o procul este, profani*'), is forced to stop outside the entrance and allowed to experience the place only at one remove when the Sibyl condenses the comprehensive tour she once had from her mentor Hecate: 565 *ipsa deum poenas docuit perque omnia duxit.* And even then there are questions the initiand should not ask: 614 *ne quaere doceri* ...

The narrative is structured so as to provide an internal model for Virgil's larger-scale second-hand reporting, with Virgil the intermediary now played by the Sibyl, his more expansive sources replaced by Hecate, and the benighted reader represented by Aeneas. Hecate's primacy in this context is boosted by the fact that Servius thought it plausible to etymologize her name from ἕκατον: who more capable of hundred-mouthed exposition?[34] The bulk of the Sibyl's précis is an ecphrasis conjuring up the horrific sights denied to her companion: 582, 585 *uidi*, 596 *cernere erat.*

[31] Most (n. 2). He notes at 1024–5 that, as an act of homage to Virgil, Silius makes his Scipionic Sibyl defer to the superior authority of the Sibyl contemporary with Aeneas.

[32] Most (n. 2), 1022.

[33] Norden (n. 5), 348, 275–6; F. Solmsen, 'The world of the dead in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*', in S. J. Harrison (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Vergil's Aeneid* (Oxford, 1990), 208–23; Quiter (n. 2), 103–11. Zetzel (n. 29), 364–72 rescues Tartarus from critical neglect and uncovers some of the characteristics and anomalies of this section: the frustrations of Tantalus are transferred to the Lapiths, Ixion, and Pirithous (601–606); Ixion's wheel and Sisyphus' rock are ascribed to a generalized *alii* (616); and many of the crimes and punishments are specifically Roman. See now D. H. Berry, 'The criminals in Virgil's Tartarus: contemporary allusion in *Aeneid* 6.621–4', *CQ* 42 (1992), 416–20.

[34] J. J. O'Hara, *True Names: Virgil and the Alexandrian Tradition of Etymological Wordplay* (Ann Arbor, 1996), 158; Servius *ad Aen.* 4.510 *ter centum tonat ore deos.*

Before then Aeneas is given a foretaste of the place from what can be seen and heard at its entrance: a gateway with adamantine columns, an iron tower rising above the wall, Tisiphone in her bloodied robe, screams and the clanking of chains. But when the Sibyl takes over the narrative she hams up the creaky, suspenseful moment of exclusive revelation (573–4 *tum demum horrisono stridentes cardine sacrae/panduntur portae*) and consciously magnifies the terror: Tisiphone outside was savage enough (572 *saeua*), but the Hydra inside is more so (577 *saeuior*).[35] There is a straining quality to the sinners and their punishments: their bodies stretched out (571 *toruosque ... intentans anguis*, 592–3 *telum/contorsit*, 596–7 *per tota nouem cui iugera corpus/porrigitur*), their fates endlessly suspended (602–3 *iam iam lapsura cadentique/imminet adsimilis* (symbolically, a hypermetric line), 617–18 *sedet aeternumque sedebit/infelix Theseus*) and all respite postponed (600 *nec fibris requies datur ulla renatis*).[36]

This is the central point of Virgil's Underworld, topographically, temporally, and textually.[37] However, the description is curiously short, which provoked Otis to call both Tartarus and the Elysian Fields 'summarily treated and ... an obviously secondary part of the narrative'.[38] Solmsen in his study of *Aeneid* 6 rejects this assessment, arguing that in the passage it is possible to detect repeated aspirations towards ὕψος.[39] Indeed, 'immense' adjectives crowd this picture of gigantic figures and vast natural features: 576 *immanis Hydra*, 582–3 *immania .../corpora*, 583 *magnum caelum*, 594 *immani turbine*, 597 *immanis uultur*, 616 *saxum ingens*, 619 *magna uoce* (Phlegyas' voice, but programmatic for the Sibyl's own amplification; cf. 607 *intonat uoce*). And yet sublimity and drastic abbreviation are hardly incompatible: it is the coexistence of the two features that gives the passage its distinctive character and adds point to the Sibyl's professions of speechlessness. She is unable to reproduce the full horror of Tartarus (565 *perque omnia duxit*; cp. 627 [*non*] *omnia poenarum percurrere nomina possim*), and that is why she gives up so soon, her alleged incapacity in line with the sinners' suspended longing and at odds with their monstrous daring and monstrous success in the upper world (624 *ausi omnes immane nefas ausoque potiti*).

Why does the Sibyl clam up exactly where she does? The last category of sinners to be mentioned is people who have committed incest, invaded their daughters' bedrooms, and entered into forbidden 'marriages' with them: 623 *hic thalamum inuasit natae uetitosque hymenaeos.* There follows the hasty, all-embracing etcetera: 624 *ausi omnes immane nefas ausoque potiti.* Is there a special reason for her revulsion? The Sibyl draws a veil over Aeneas' viewing of Daedalus' scenes on Apollo's temple at the beginning of Book 6 (leading Casali to conjecture that she is hiding the story of Theseus deserting Ariadne, a sensitive and distracting subject for the deserter Aeneas).[40] This might encourage us to think that there is something here, too, that she wants to hush up. The Sibyl is emphatically *uirgo* in Virgil, yet Norden and others have seen sexual undertones in the account of her possession by Apollo, from

[35] Norden (n. 5), 273.

[36] M. Paschalis, *Virgil's Aeneid: Semantic Relations and Proper Names* (Oxford, 1997), 234–6 notes the etymology of *Titanes* from τείνομαι, 'lie stretched out', and claims that *Tityus* evokes the same idea.

[37] Zetzel (n. 29), 365.

[38] B. Otis, *Virgil: A Study in Civilized Poetry* (Oxford, 1964), 297.

[39] Solmsen (n. 33), 216, n. 27.

[40] Casali (n. 24).

which Ovid draws out his story of the god's unsuccessful bid for her virginity.[41] Virgil gives his Sibyl a new name, Deiphobe, and makes her the daughter of Glaucus, probably a prophetic sea god (36 *Deiphobe Glauci*). But there is another tradition (found in the scholia to Lycophron's *Alexandra*) that she is Apollo's sister.[42] Other authors identify other Sibyls as Apollo's sister or daughter. Pausanias, for example, writes of the Delphic Sibyl: 'she calls herself ... Artemis and the wedded wife of Apollo, saying too sometimes that she is his sister and sometimes that she is his daughter'.[43] In other words, hidden in the tangled alternative genealogies of various Sibyls might be a traumatic personal reason for the abrupt breaking-off.[44]

Tartarus, the fathomless abyss, is unquestionably an immense subject worthy of the 'hundred mouths' cliché. But such a formulaic ending would still be bathetic, if it were not that the Sibyl has a striking property that uniquely qualifies her (or disqualifies her) to voice it. She does have a hundred mouths. Virgil says exactly that in his description of her cave at lines 42–4:[45]

> excisum Euboicae latus ingens rupis in antrum
> quo lati ducunt aditus centum, ostia centum,
> unde ruunt totidem uoces, responsa Sibyllae.

To give the cave a hundred broad entrances, a hundred orifices and the same number of voices is no doubt poetic exaggeration; only six lateral windows are visible in the Cumaean cave excavated by Amadeo Maiuri in 1932 and thought, though still controversially, to be the cave described in *Aeneid* 6.[46] Sockets and door-frames visible inside suggest that these 'mouths' opened to correspond with the Sibyl's utterances.[47] The cave, then, stands as mouthpiece to the Sibyl as the Sibyl herself stands to Apollo.[48] Virgil replaces the obvious *ora* with the etymologically related *ostia*, but he ties the openings to the prophetess with *responsa Sibyllae*, as though sounds in the cave literally issued from her mouth (though the inner sanctum was in fact too far

[41] Norden (n. 5), *ad* 6.77 80. The idea, dismissed by Austin (n. 5), ad loc., as 'unnecessary', is revived by Hershkowitz (n. 20), 42 3; D. Fowler, 'Masculinity under threat? The poetics and politics of inspiration in Latin poetry', in E. Spentzou and D. Fowler (edd.), *Cultivating the Muse: Struggles for Power and Inspiration in Classical Literature* (Oxford, 2002), 141 60, at 149; A. Sharrock, 'An a-musing tale: gender, genre, and Ovid's battles with inspiration in the *Metamorphoses*', ibid., 207 27, at 212; Spentzou, ibid. (see n. 20), 18 19.

[42] Schol. *ad* Lycoph. *Alex.* 1279.

[43] Pausan. 10.12.1; cf. Suda Σ 355, Plut. *Mor.* 389c (the Delphic Sibyl as Apollo's daughter by Lamia).

[44] Zetzel (n. 29), 365, n. 4 suggests that Aeneas' idea of the Underworld is selective because everyone has their own private Hell (cf. 6.743 *quisque suos patimur manis*). He regards the Sibyl as one of the more objective witnesses, yet it is striking how many of the named incumbents of her Tartarus are rapists or would be rapists—Ixion, Pirithous, the Lapiths, Tityus—while Phlegyas, who utters the dire warning at 620, *discite iustitiam moniti et non temnere diuos*, had a daughter, Coronis, who was raped by Apollo.

[45] Is it significant that line 43 echoes *G.* 2.43 *non, mihi si linguae centum sint oraque centum*?

[46] A. Maiuri, *The Phlegraean Fields*, trans. V. Priestley (Rome, 1958), 123 32. In favour: R. J. Clark, 'Vergil, *Aeneid* 6, 40ff.', *Latomus* 36 (1977), 482 95; Monti (n. 21), with a nice sense of the balance between topographical realism and poetic licence. Against: M. Pagano, 'Una nuova interpretazione del cosidetto "Antro della Sibilla" a Cuma', *Puteoli* 9 10 (1985 86), 83 120; P. Caputo, R. Morichi, and P. Rispoli, *Cuma e il suo parco archeologico: un territorio e sue testimonianze* (Rome, 1996); see A. G. McKay's review article in *Vergilius* 43 (1997), 78–88. Parke (n. 1), 80 concludes: 'Vergil's vivid description was a product of his poetic invention and not based directly on any recent procedure of consultation at Cumae.'

[47] For a description, see Parke (n. 1), 80.

[48] And Apollo in turn is a *uates* of Jupiter (3.251 2): Paschalis (n. 36), 210.

away for this to be feasible).[49] The repeated number 'one hundred' may represent a large round figure, as it commonly does. It may, as Servius claims, be intimately connected with the number of words in a sibylline prophecy.[50] But either way it is also there to set up a link with the epic cliché that comes later. To lay further groundwork for this, Virgil emphasizes the hundred mouths again in relation to the Sibyl's bodily mouth at 80–2: *os rabidum, fera corda domans, fingitque premendo,/ostia iamque domus patuere ingentia centum./sponte sua uatisque ferunt responsa per auras.* The relationship is intermittently inverted: the Sibyl herself is given many mouths (100 *rabida ora quierunt*), while the cave is personified as 'dumbfounded', with its mouth (or mouths) stopped (52–3 *neque enim ante dehiscent/attonitae magna ora domus*).[51]

These orifices are only the first of many mouths described in the Underworld, if one counts all the foul gaping jaws, yawning chasms, and belching gullets of its geographical and bestial fixtures: the cave and lake of Avernus (201 *fauces graue olentis Auerni*, 237 *spelunca ... uastoque immanis hiatu*, 240–1 *talis sese halitus atris/faucibus effundens*), Acheron (296–7 *turbidus hic caeno uastaque uoragine gurges/aestuat atque omnem Cocyto eructat harenam*), three-throated Cerberus (417 *Cerberus haec ingens latratu regna trifauci*, 421 *tria guttura pandens*). Virgil's metaphor for poetic exposition (*pandere*) becomes an appropriate response to the subject of opening up the jaws of Hell.[52] These parallels between multiple mouths, apocalyptic narrative, and descriptive immeasurability peak, predictably, in Tartarus, where the opening of the gates of Hell (574 *panduntur portae*) stands next to the figure of a fifty-mouthed Hydra (576 *quinquaginta atris immanis hiatibus Hydra*[53]) and an attempt to calculate the unfathomable depth of the abyss, said to span twice the distance from Earth to Olympus (577–9 *tum Tartarus ipse/bis patet in praeceps tantum tenditque sub umbras/quantus ad aetherium caeli suspectus Olympum*).[54] Virgil's surrogate, the Sibyl, will ask for a hundred mouths to describe

[49] Parke (n. 1), 80. Austin (n. 5), ad loc. notes the suggestive echoes in 41 2 *antrum/... centum*, 43 4 *ducunt .../... ruunt*, 42 4 *Euboicae .../... Sibyllae*; cf. also 81 *ingentia centum*.

[50] Serv. *ad Aen.* 6.43 *responsa enim Sibyllae in hoc loco plus minus centum sermonum sunt. inueniuntur tamen Apollinis logia et uiginti quinque et trium sermonum: unde melius est finitum pro infinito accipi.*

[51] See Monti (n. 21), 31 2 on the metonymic relationship of Sibyl and cave. Aeneas, too, is heavily associated with mouths: 76 *finem dedit ore loquendi*, 108 *genitoris ... ora*, 109 *sacra ostia*.

[52] Paschalis (n. 36), 209 10, 219 20 notes the prevalence of mouths in the Underworld and the connection with the narrative *pandere* but does not make the link with the Sibyl's Homeric cliché. Sharrock (n. 41), 211 12 does see a parallel between the poetic 'mouths' cliché and the Sibyl's hundred-mouthed cave (while discussing the feminizing of Virgil's poetic persona through the Sibyl's role as passive mouthpiece of Apollo), but she cites the *Georgics* version of 'many mouths' and not the more immediate one spoken by the Sibyl in the *Aeneid*. E. Oliensis, 'Sibylline syllables: the intratextual *Aeneid*', *PCPS* 50 (2004), 29–45 makes the connection explicitly but in passing, as I realized only after writing this paper. I am very grateful to Professor Oliensis for showing me her article in manuscript.

[53] Norden (n. 5), ad loc., notes that this is the only line in Virgil with five long a-sounds—presumably to suggest multiple *hiatus*. Pers. *Sat.* 5.3 connects the 'many mouths' topos with the gaping mouth (*hianda*) of the tragic actor who utters it.

[54] A doubling of the original Homeric distance (*Il.* 8.16; cf. Hes. *Theog.* 720); Norden (n. 5), ad loc., sees a parallel with the multiplication of Homeric voices at 625. The description of Tartarus at Hes. *Theog.* 726 8 involves a 'bronze wall' (χάλκεον ἔρκος) and the metaphor of a bottle neck (δειρήν): see M. L. West, *Hesiod Theogony* (Oxford, 1966), ad loc., on δειρήν: 'Perhaps it was understood more literally, of a yawning throat.' Joshua Katz kindly drew my attention to this.

a vast subject, which, even in its abridged state, includes at least fifty mouths (in Tartarus alone) and well over a hundred 'mouths' (in the Underworld as a whole).[55]

Far from feebly recycling an overused cliché, Virgil is reviving it by applying it at last to someone unique: a figure who really does have a hundred mouths at her disposal. True, the Sibyl asks for only one voice, an iron one (*ferrea uox*), when she had a hundred in her cave (44 *totidem uoces*), but even this concession to the usual formula is a fitting response to the sound of clanking iron that reaches Aeneas' ears from the other side of the Tartarean wall: 558 *tum stridor ferri tractaeque catenae*.[56] The end of her expression, where it differs from that of the *Georgics*, is tailored specifically to the experience of the Underworld: grasping at forms (*comprendere formas*) is exactly what Aeneas does when he meets insubstantial ghosts (for example, 2.793 *ter frustra comprensa manus effugit imago*, 6.293 *caua sub imagine formae*), and going through names is the Sibyl's job as both prophetess (3.444 *foliisque notas et nomina mandat*) and galloping guide.[57]

Ovid, meanwhile, in his rewriting of Virgil in *Metamorphoses* 14, chooses to make a strong division between the Sibyl's single voice and the hundredfold years of her life (14.145–6, 153 *superest .../ter centum messes, ter centum musta uidere ... uoce tamen noscar, uocem mihi fata relinquent*). This is in order to set up an early parallel for his own unique and immortal poetic voice, the exception that proves the rule of multiplicity and change (15.878–9 *ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama,/ si quid habent ueri uatum praesagia, uiuam*), at the moment when he gives the Sibyl back her own voice and allows her time to tell her own story.[58] The anaphora of *ter centum* here echoes both *Aen.* 6.43 *aditus centum, ostia centum* and *Aen.* 6.625 *linguae centum ... oráque centum.* At the risk of making the Sibyl's words seem over-determined, I would hazard a guess that all three lines are meant to sound sibylline, both in their ritual repetitiveness and in their emphasis on numbers, especially multiples of ten.[59] After all, many of the stories surrounding

[55] Is it possible that Virgil deliberately chose the fifty mouthed Hydra over alternative monsters, the hundred headed Typho of Hes. *Theog.* 825 or the hundred mouthed Echidna of Ar. *Frogs* 473 (K. Dover [ed.], *Aristophanes Frogs* [Oxford, 1993], ad loc., also cites a *hundred* headed Hydra at Eur. *HF* 1190), in order to avoid too obvious a relationship at this point between subject matter and poetic capacity? The Hydra is allowed a hundred snake heads at 7.658; other many mouthed Virgilian monsters include Fama (4.182–3 *tot uigiles oculi subter (mirabile dictu),/tot linguae, totidem ora sonant, tot subrigit auris*) and Aegeon (10.565–7 *centum cui bracchia dicunt/centenasque manus, quinquaginta oribus ignem/pectoribusque arsisse*; cf. 6.100 *centumgeminus Briareus*). See Ford (n. 6), 190–1 on Hesiod's Typho, with his confused and unlimited mouths, as a 'super- and subhuman version' of the divinely inspired poetic voice. For the Nile's multiple mouths trembling in response to Sibylline oracles, see 6.798–800 *et Caspia regna/responsis horrent diuum et Maeotia tellus,/et septem gemini turbant trepida ostia Nili* (E. Norden, 'Ein Panegyricus auf Augustus in Vergils Aeneis', *RhM* 54 [1899], 467–82, at 477–82, takes *responsis ... diuum* as referring to current Sibylline prophecies); cf. Luc. 8.824–5 *Cumanae carmine uatis/cautum ne Nili Pelusia tangeret ora.* Aeneas twice speaks through *centum oratores* (7.153, 11.331).

[56] Paschalis (n. 36), 220 suggests alternatively that the *ferrea uox* is an answer to the *atra silex* of 6.602. J. J. H. Savage, 'The Cyclops, the Sibyl and the poet', *TAPA* 93 (1962), 410–42, also notes echoes with *ferrea turris* (554), *solidoque adamante columnae* (552), and *horri sono stridentes cardine sacrae* (573).

[57] Just as *amplecti* (*G.* 2.42) might be regarded as a tender arboricultural metaphor: the same verb is used of vines embracing elm trees at *G.* 2.367.

[58] Cf. Ellsworth (n. 2), 53.

[59] For Virgilian repetition of *centum* in a ritual context, cf. *Aen.* 1.634–5 *magnorum horrentia centum/terga suum, pinguis centum cum matribus agnos*, 4.199–200 *templa Ioui centum latis immania regnis,/centum aras posuit.*

the Sibyl involve numbers—huge, infinite, or paradoxical: the thousand grains of sand, for example, which condemned Ovid's Sibyl to a thousand years of life, or the three Sibylline books Tarquin bought for the price of nine.[60] More specifically, the Cumaean Sibyl divided time into ten *saecula*, or periods of a hundred years: a Republican oracle, for example, preserved by Phlegon of Tralles, starts with a prediction for 110 years' time, blessing the Ludi Saeculares of 17 B.C.;[61] in A.D. 19 came the ominous prophecy, 'When thrice three hundred years have passed over, the Romans shall perish through civil war and sybaritic folly.' Ovid's Sibyl thus substitutes a prediction about her own life-span for the usual prophecies about the millennial stretch of history.[62]

What effect, then, does Virgil's Sibyl's conditional clause ('If I had a hundred mouths') produce, given that it is no longer exactly a conditional? Hyperbole beyond hyperbole: even a witness who does have a hundred mouths would still be incapable of describing Hell. It is questionable whether she would be allowed to in any case.[63] Yet by adding her version of 'many mouths' to those of the echoing multitude, the Sibyl, mystery-guide and conduit for vatic inspiration, channels herself and Virgil into the mainstream of the oral poetic tradition. Poet and priestess are suspended between brazen revelation and superstitious awe in the face of the unspeakable.[64] The old expression can now be read in two new ways. Either it is simply funny for being especially apt (the Sibyl *is* already hundred-mouthed or, more pedantically, she regrets leaving her extra mouths behind in her cave) or else it is a supreme gesture towards inexpressible immensity, which opens up a bottomless pit as deep as Tartarus itself. It is not as though a two-way reading can be ruled out for anything this prophetess says. Farrell writes: '[I]t is hard to imagine that Vergil didn't smile when he borrowed these lines [from the *Georgics*] intact to play a much more conventionally heroic role in the *Aeneid*.'[65] I would like to think the smile was directed at the new context just as much as the old one, and that it was a peculiarly sibylline smile.

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[60] Grains of dust: Ov. *Met.* 14.137 8 *quot haberet corpora puluis,/tot mihi natales contin gere uana rogaui.* Tarquin and the Sibyl: Dion. Hal. 4.62, Gell. 1.19, Lactant. *Div. Inst.* 1.6, Serv. *ad Aen.* 6.72.

[61] *FGrH* 257 F 37, 1189 90: ἀλλ' ὁπόταν μήκιστος ἵκη χρόνος ἀνθρώποισιν ζωῆς, εἰς ἐτέων ἑκατὸν δέκα κύκλον ὁδεύσας, Dio 57.18.4; cf. Virg. *Ecl.* 4.4 5 *ultima Cumaei uenit iam carmi nis aetas;/magnus ab integro saeclorum nascitur ordo* (Serv., ad loc., interprets *ultima* as 'tenth'). Several scholars have noticed links between words in the same Sibylline prophecy (3 μεμνῆσθαι, Ῥωμαῖϵ) and Anchises' *Romane memento* (6.851): see Zetzel (n. 29), 378.

[62] On the Sibyl and the *saecula*, see H. Jeanmaire, *La Sibylle et le retour de l'âge d'or* (Paris, 1939); Nisbet (n. 2), 60 1; Parke (n. 1), 150, n. 13; Serv. *ad Ecl.* 4.4.

[63] At Apul. *Met.* 11.25 Lucius asks for a thousand mouths and tongues (*ora mille linguaeque totidem*) to describe the many formed Isis, yet at *Met.* 11.23 the author has already turned on the uninitiated reader and warned of the penalties to which wagging tongues are liable: *sed parem noxam contraherent et aures et lingua, ista impiae loquacitatis, illae temerariae curiositatis.* The Sibyl makes a similar hush-hush gesture at *Aen.* 6.155: *pressoque obmutuit ore.*

[64] Grains of sand represent unthinkable infinity in Pind. *Ol.* 2.98 and Cat. 7.3 4. Ford (n. 6), 85 cites these along with Apollo's boast through his Delphic priestess at Hdt. 1.47.3, 'I know the number of the sands and the measures of the sea', in the context of apotropaic prayers against complete enumeration.

[65] Farrell (n. 7), 233.