

THE STARS AS A THEME IN THE AENEID

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I

If we take "stars" in its widest astronomical sense to denote unnamed points of light in the sky, unspecified constellations or patterns of light, and celestial bodies like comets or meteors, and then incorporate the singular of these concepts, we compute a total of 85 references to the stars in the *Aeneid*. Twenty are to stars or constellations, *astra*, 50 are to groups of stars or constellations, *sidera*, seven are to a single star or constellation, *sidus*, six are to clusters of stars outside constellations, *stellae*, one is to one such star, *stella*, and one is to comets, *cometae*.¹

The object of this essay is to establish whether there is any discernible interplay between these references, any clear thematic threads interwoven in their presentation, or whether they are merely disconnected and widely disparate from one another as might at first seem likely.

II

The first reference to *astra* in the *Aeneid* occurs while Jupiter allays Venus' anxiety for Aeneas (cf. 1.229-253; 257-296). His reassurances ordain the future in both the primary and secondary chronological fields of the epic (1.257-260; 261-296).² Augustus' catasterism is obliquely the issue here (cf. 1.287, *famam qui terminet astris*); the limits of his aspirations are set by the stars alone, to which he will eventually be raised as a tutelary being (1.290). His future elevation is confirmed in Anchises' oracular prophecy of Roman history (cf. 6.789-790), and carries a clear resonance of Aeneas' own exaltation, disclosed to Venus as an earnest beyond death itself:

parce metu, Cytherea, manent immota tuorum
fata tibi; cernes urbem et promissa Lavini
moenia sublimemque feres ad sidera caeli
magnanimum Aenean; neque me sententia vertit.

(1.257-260)

"Dismiss your fears, Cytherea, the destiny of your people is irrevocably ordained for your sake; you shall see their city and

¹ Cf. Warwick 1975: s.v. *astrum*, *sidus*, *stella*, *cometes*; Wetmore 1961: *ibid.*; Lewis and Short 1966: *ibid.* Note that the Latin text used in this essay is that of Williams: 1973 and 1975. Since Rome's destiny in the *Aeneid* culminates amongst the stars at large (the climax of the astral theme of the poem), and not in the field of a single constellation, this essay ignores Virgil's specific references to the zodiac (except for 10.272-275), as well as his references to particular stars (except for 8.589). Nor is any account taken of the poet's cosmology (except briefly in the conclusions).

² For an explanation of the time-scales in the *Aeneid*, Williams 1983:5-6, 132-156.

the promised walls of Lavinium, and shall exalt your great-hearted son Aeneas to the stars of heaven; I have not changed my design."

Jupiter's promise, moreover, is ultimately reaffirmed to Juno herself, the principal cause of all Aeneas' misfortune:

indigetem Aenean scis ipsa et scire fateris
deberi caelo fatisque ad sidera tolli.

(12.794-795)

"You yourself know, and admit you know, that Italy's hero Aeneas must be raised by heaven to his fated place amongst the stars."

So Aeneas' proud spirit, too, is intended for the glory of the stars, as indeed are the Romans to follow. King Latinus, while taking counsel with his dead father in the shadow of the Latin war, elicits this very implication from Faunus' oracle, after learning that Aeneas is destined to marry Lavinia (7.98-99, *externi venient generi, qui sanguine nostrum/nomen in astra ferant*; "sons-in-law shall come from another land, who by mingling their blood with ours will exalt our name to the stars").

The Latin war, then, in all its enormity, its gathering flames ascending to the stars (cf. 9.76, *ad astra*),³ is here projected as an integral part of the cosmogony of Rome, as a motive force in the eventual catasterism of the Romans themselves.

King Latinus, finally, while reflecting on his father's portent (7.271-272, *nostrum/nomen in astra ferant*), unconsciously evokes the promise made to Aeneas by the *penates*, the tutelary gods of Troy (cf. 3.158, *tollemus in astra nepotes*; "we shall raise your grandsons to the stars"). So the translation of Aeneas' descendants, too, is assured by the inviolable workings of destiny.⁴

III

Jupiter's consolation of Venus, as we have seen, embraces the entire temporal scope of the *Aeneid*, encompassing as it does both the Homeric setting of the main action (1.257-271), and a highly poetical conception of Virgil's own day (1.286-296).

Accordingly, catasterism is ordained in the epic, by Jupiter's all-pervading will, as the culmination of individual destiny at the two poles of Rome's emergence to world-power: as Aeneas' due in the tumult of the Homeric age (1.257-266), as Augustus' reward at the dawn of the remote epoch of universal peace and freedom from civil war accompanying the nation's rise to boundless empire (1.291-296).

³ The full description reads: *piceum fert fumida lumen/taeda et commixtam Volcanus ad astra favillam* (9.75-76). Compare Pöschl's comment: "From where (Turnus) picks up the burning pine torch, the power of the flame mounts to the torches of the men, to the action of the fire-god, to the eruption of fire as a cosmic force which 'reaches up to the stars' " (1962:103). Cf. too, n. 20 below.

⁴ Compare the mutual oaths sworn at 12.195-197 by Aeneas and Latinus, the latter invoking the stars.

The final recompense of individual merit in the *Aeneid*, then, grows out of a prolonged and disastrous phase of war, the preordained outcome of which ensures the fulfilment of Rome's destiny by virtue of her relentless accession to military and historical supremacy (cf. 1.7, *altae moenia Romae*).

The moment of inexorable fate in the poem, again, the ultimate and decisive victory - the event which extends the field of Rome's triumph beyond the path of the zodiac (cf. 6.795, *iacet extra sidera tellus*)⁵ - is prefigured as occurring at the battle of Actium, and is thus obliquely ordained by Jupiter himself, the power who turns the cosmic axis of the stars (9.93, *torquet qui sidera mundi*) and the consummator of Rome's imperial might:

his ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono:
imperium sine fine dedi.

(1.278-179)

"On them I impose no limits of dominion or time: I have conferred an infinite empire."

Conversely, however, the epoch of order and serenity accompanying Rome's accession to boundless empire after Actium is envisaged as the outcome of extended human suffering provoked or allowed by heaven (1.3-4, 8-11, 33),⁶ and is thus inseparably and irrevocably linked to the Latin war in the fulfilment of Aeneas' destiny (1.263-266), and to the calamity of civil war besides in the analogue of Augustus' fated rise to power (1.291-296).

Aspects of these primary themes of the *Aeneid* emerge from Iulus' triumphant initiation into the Latin war in Book 9 (9.590-663). Even as an arrow flies from his bow to pass through Remulus' head, his vow to Jupiter, dedicated in specific petition of victory over the boastful Rutulian, is condoned by an oracle (9.630-631), and while the Trojans exult to the very stars reserved for their apotheosis (9.637, *animosque ad sidera tollunt*),⁷ Apollo's consecration of the exploit obliquely reasserts the ungoverned vastness of Rome's destiny and the inexorable manner of its achievement, which opens the route to the stars by the horror of war:

macte nova virtute, puer, sic itur ad astra,
dis genite et geniture deos. iure omnia bella
gente sub Assaraci fato ventura resident,
nec te Troia capit.

(9.641-644)

⁵ Anchises' epiphany of Roman history (6.756-859) thus foretells that the frontiers of Rome's power will extend beyond the limits of the world, beyond the course of the stars. Contrast the destiny of the Greeks, who will merely "recount the rising of the stars" (6.850).

⁶ Note too, the context in which Jupiter, the consummator of fate in the *Aeneid*, is accorded the title "wheeler of the cosmic stars" (9.93): the fulfilment of human destiny is inseparably bound up with difficulty and toil (9.95-97).

⁷ Compare the echo of this theme at 10.262, where the Trojans acclaim Aeneas' return from Pallanteum with a band of allies to join the war against Mezentius and Turnus.

"A fine display of first valour, young prince, that is the way to the stars, child of gods and father of gods to follow. All the wars fated to come shall rightly resolve themselves under the race of Assaracus, and Troy can never contain your prowess."

Again, his father's Julian star crowns Augustus' head at the battle of Actium (8.681, *patriumque aperitur vertice sidus*), thus signifying a link between Actium and heaven, between the emperor's crushing victory in the civil war and his promised assumption to the stars (cf. 1.287, *famam qui terminet astris*).

Then too, Aeneas himself, aflame with terrible zeal (12.945-947), and exulting in full pride of his battle-madness - he is imbued at last, it seems, in a flash of insight, with a vision of his celestial destiny⁸ - rebukes Turnus prophetically in the final stages of the epic, asserting that his lot is finally cast, since even his hypothetical flight to the stars must come to naught (cf. 12.892-893, *opta ardua pennis/astra sequi*).

Then, seized with rage at the sight of Pallas' sword-belt, which Turnus is wearing, Aeneas, in the closing scene of the poem, stabs his opponent to death in savage and vengeful rejection of his plea for mercy.

Rome's starry destiny, then, and with it the whole perspective of future history in the *Aeneid*, issues from a considered and brutal act of hatred (cf. 12.938), which opens the way for the catastrophe of the perpetrator and of the Romans themselves, whose allotted destiny turns on the ravages of Aeneas' triumph in the Latin war.⁹

IV

Incidentally linked to the climax of Rome's brilliantly inviolable destiny, to the remote stars as the completion of her apotheosis, is a sequence in Book 2 recounting the fall of Priam's tower, the last bulwark of Troy, a structure occupying the heights of the palace and striving to the stars themselves (cf. 2.460, *sub astra*), and which the Trojans dislodge onto the Greek host below in a final effort to avert the destruction of their city - the piercing of the actual heart of Priam's ancestral home, the wantonness of his murder.

⁸ Contrast his inability to grasp the meaning of the parade of Roman heroes marshalled by Achises (6.854), and his insensibility to the significance of the shield delivered to him by Venus (8.730).

⁹ Cf. 10.272-275 where the effect of Aeneas' return to the war is compared to the blight emanating from the dog-star of Orion, though he is joyfully greeted by the Trojans (n. 7 above). See too, 12.451 where Aeneas' march on Turnus' army is likened to a thunderhead which blots out the stars. And compare, above all, Virgil's picture, in one of the most harrowing sequences of the poem (11.182-212), of the desolation sprung from the Latin war, a scene finally obliterated by the dark and starry night (11.201-202, *nox umida donec/invertit caelum stellis ardentibus aptum*), a formula which evokes Anchises' vision of Rome's supernal destiny at 6.796-797 (*ubi caelifer Atlas/axem umero torquet stellis ardentibus aptum*). See too, n. 22 below *ad fin.*

The ineffectual collapse of the tower foreshadows the wretchedness of the old king's doom, the impotent caprice of his resistance (2.518-524), and serves as an oblique pointer, by a process of inversion, to the distant climax of Rome's infinite destiny.¹⁰

Thus after leaving Troy, Aeneas and his band, while still engaged in their search for their new home, offer a refuge in Sicily, a haven under Acestes' auspices, to those now resigning their part in the exacting mission (5.709-718), and there construct a temple to Venus that again reaches starwards from the heights of Eryx (cf. 5.759, *vicina astris*).

Accordingly, the Trojans who repudiate Aeneas' wanderings at this juncture - those who decide to remain in Sicily in what is perceived as their accustomed element: a new Ilium, a revenant Troy (5.756-758)¹¹ - merely resume the trajectory of their history after the fall of Troy.

On the other hand, again, those who answer the call of Aeneas' awesome fate, actuated in time by the details of Anchises' revelations (cf. 6.889), dedicate themselves by their compliance to an ineffably higher purpose, which, with its peculiarly exacting tribulations (1.3-4), is fated to reach its inevitable climax in the rise of Rome to universal empire (1.279), and in her promised exaltation to the stars by virtue of her military prowess.

Thus, the more terrible the fall of Troy - witness the anguish of those involved, the starward ascent of their cries¹² - the more vividly must Rome's catasterism be inferred from its ashes. Whence the advent of the blazing comet (2.694, *stella facem ducens*), which manifests itself as the city falls, obliterating Anchises' opposition to the Trojans' mission (2.637-638) and insinuating the future for which he is rendered, the true direction his destiny must take (2.701-704).

Thus, the wondrous and compelling portent (cf. 2.700, *sanctum sidus adorat*; "(Anchises) worships the holy star"), which Anchises solicits from heaven itself for confirmation of the omen of flames around Iulus' head (2.687-688, *oculos ad sidera laetus/extulit*; "he joyfully raised his eyes to the stars"), is implicitly contrived to inaugurate the grand design of Rome's destiny, the glory of her eventual catasterism.¹³ For Anchises' influence on the Trojans' approaching mission is absolute and decisive - and endures, we may note, far beyond the ostensible finality of his death (cf. 3.710-

¹⁰ Cf. n. 13 below *ad fin.* Contrast the symbolic collapse, once Turnus recognizes that he cannot escape a duel with Aeneas, of the tower of the Latin city whose construction he himself has supervised (12.672-675).

¹¹ Their decision complies with Helenus' injunction at 3.462, *fer ad aethera Troiam*. Cf. below, n. 16. Compare the symbolism of Acestes' arrow at 5.525-528, the flames of which simply disappear, unlike the portentous fires of Anchises' comet at 2.694. (The omen is provoked by the dove shot by Eurytion, which abandons its spirit amongst the stars (5.517), leaving Acestes without a target in the archery contest at the funeral games.)

¹² Cf. 2.222 (Laocoon) and 2.488 (cries from Priam's palace). For similar examples of anguish rising to the stars: 5.256; 10.193; 11.37, 832-833, 878.

¹³ Cf. Quinn 1968:120; the episode suggests that "the destruction of Troy by the gods was not a purposeless act of malevolence, but the working-out of a divine plan which is constructive as well as destructive: Troy falls, Rome rises".

711) - and it is only by virtue of his agreement, secured by Jupiter himself; that Aeneas and his band actually embark on their glorious undertaking at all.

Consider, too, Hector's prophetic command to Aeneas, issued during the fall of Troy, to "seek mighty walls" (2.294-295), an oracle eventually transformed, at whatever remove, into the mighty walls of Rome (cf. 1.7, *altae moenia Romae*).¹⁴

The collapse of Priam's tower, then, the last bastion of Troy, ultimately resolves itself, through Aeneas' forbearance, into the boundless destiny of Rome, even though there remains, haunting the fulfilment of the nation's glory, the desolating episode of the sack of Troy and the grim cameo of Priam's end in the toils of war:¹⁵

haec finis Priami fatorum, hic exitus illum
sorte tulit Troiam incensam et prolapsa videntem
Pergama, tot quondam populis terrisque superbum
regnatorem Asiae. iacet ingens litore truncus,
avulsumque umeris caput et sine nomine corpus.

(2.554-558)

"This was the close of Priam's destiny, this was the fated end that fell out for him as he watched Troy burning - once, with its sundry peoples and lands, the proud ruler of Asia - and saw its tower fallen. A huge body lies on the shore, the head torn from the shoulders, a corpse without a name."

V

The theme of the distant stars as elements of complicity in Aeneas' fate, as collaborators in the achievement of Rome's enormous destiny, is to be found in several episodes in Book 3, which, reduced to its essence, tells of the Trojans' prolonged and vexing search for Italy after the fall of Troy (cf. 3.96, *antiquam exquirite matrem*). Inevitably, fate is in action throughout their seemingly interminable quest for their primeval mother, so that the perilous course of their journey - an ordeal of almost constant misinterpretation, uncertainty and confusion - is set in motion by the anomalous and riddling devices of prophecy (3.4-5), and is continually motivated by the same contrivance, notably through the intrusion of Apollo.

Jupiter, however, though he consummates the primacy of fate in the *Aeneid* (cf. 10.113), neglects to ward off the buffets endured by the Trojans in their quest for Italy (1.3-4), or to divest their mission of the hardships in store for them at their journey's end (cf. 6.86, *bella, horrida bella*). For the ordeal imposed on Aeneas, the trials to which he is especially predestined, are contrived to mould him inwardly, to transform him, through an incalculable heavenly purpose (1.11), into an instrument of fate in the inauguration of Rome's measureless destiny, into the harbinger of her eventual assumption to the stars.

¹⁴ For the development of this theme, e.g., 1.258-259, 264; 5.737.

¹⁵ Note how Sinon's tale, sworn by the stars (2.153), is directly linked in the composition to Priam's end which supplies the epitaph for the whole of Troy's past. Cf. Williams 1983:248-250. Compare the Greek Achaimenides' supplication, sworn too by the stars (3.599), which likewise promotes the Trojans' destiny by virtue of the guidance he gives them in their circuit round Sicily.

Thus, when finally the Trojans leave Buthrotum to enter on a fresh phase of their mission, Helenus, who is acquainted with the stars (3.360, *sidera sentis*), delivers an elliptical revelation to Aeneas (there are certain things which Juno has forbidden him to prophesy). He admonishes him to beware of the coast of eastern Italy, and to avoid the terrors of Scylla and Charybdis - where monstrous waves lash at the stars (3.423, *sidera verberat unda*) - by sailing a circuit around Sicily. Again, when at last he reaches Italy, having since fulfilled the destiny of Troy (3.462, *fer ad aethera Troiam*; "exalt Troy to the skies"), Aeneas is to solicit a revelation there from the Cumaean sibyl.¹⁶

Helenus' prophecy thus embraces, in broad general terms, the toll of misfortune yet to be overcome in the Trojans' destiny: the pain and trouble with which their quest for Italy is fraught, the perils they have yet to undergo before they reach their appointed home (cf. 3.381-387; 396-398; 495-497).

The stalwart Palinurus, however, Aeneas' helmsman, his gaze fixed intently on the stars, yearns, like Anchises himself, to set a direct course for Italy at once - to relinquish another, prior revenant of Troy (3.495-499).¹⁷ Thus, having scanned the immensity of stars gliding above Acroceraunia (3.515, *sidera cuncta notat*) - where Aeneas and his band pass the night after setting course from Buthrotum - Palinurus leads the Trojans on to fresh revelations at Castrum Minervae in eastern Italy, where Anchises interprets an omen of impending war, and, at the moment of inspiration, adds to his prophecy an assurance of peace to follow (3.543).

Encompassing the salient epochs in Rome's destiny, then, and inferring the achievement, through the horror of war, of an era of order and tranquillity emanating from the nation's emergence to world-power - a promise of the abolition of evil and distress in face of the rebirth of the golden age (6.791-793) - and thus communicating a prospect which is to reach its climax in the exaltation of the Romans themselves, the omen of the four white horses at Castrum Minervae attains a synthesis of the entire temporal scope of the *Aeneid*.

Hence the Trojans, in the final appraisal, have been fixed by providence in the circumstances of a vast continuity, its initial trajectory dictated by the exigencies of their mission, by the toil reposing as it were in Aeneas' personal stars (cf. 1.11). For the conclusion of their inordinate quest - unlike the deception of their hopes: witness the fleeting joy with which they now greet Italy - is to eventuate only much later in the introductory scenes of Book 7 (7.25-36).

Accordingly, when they resume their wanderings from Castrum Minervae and advance towards Scylla and Charybdis, the Trojans' mood of optimism is transformed into an onset of anxiety that sharpens into anguish and despair. For forces of destruction toy with their ships as they run the gauntlet of Charybdis' monstrous waves, of her beetling crags and rocks, while the blaze of the cosmic stars, the collusive entities of

¹⁶ The prophecy thus touches on the revenance of Troy and on future Rome, the history of which Anchises elucidates in the underworld, where the sibyl acts as Aeneas' guide. The links between these themes are outlined in Aeneas' words at 3.493-505. See too, 5.755-761 where the joint foundations, Troy and Ilium, rise towards the stars as with the Troy of old (2.460; 5.759). Compare 11.136 (*evertunt actas ad sidera pinus*), the context in which Drances and his band strive to erect yet another Troy. Cf. n.11 above.

¹⁷ This, at least, is the notion which haunts Aeneas. Cf. n. 11 and n. 16 above.

their fate,¹⁸ is diffused into obscurity through the screen of spray flung from the horrendous portent confronting them (cf. 3.567, *rorantia vidimus astra*).

And so, their bearings lost, they drift towards the coast of the Cyclopes and the vicinity of Etna, its flames leaping upwards to lick the stars (3.574, *sidera lambit*).¹⁹ And now a swirl of murk and cloud chokes out the accommodating fire of the stars (3.585, *neque erant astrorum ignes*), the aura of their radiance is extinguished from the sky, and the Trojans are finally engulfed in a miasma of total darkness (3.585-587).

Their first contact with the vicinity of Italy, then, instils into the Trojans' future a presentiment of impending calamity provoked by the ravages of war - of which the flames ascend starwards after the fashion of a volcano (9.75-76)²⁰ - a foreboding encouraged by the paradoxical obliteration of the stars as the necessary precursor of the distant climax of Rome's destiny.

VI

A sense of a more confined ordeal, too, invests the Trojans' encounter with the land of their fate; for the menace threatening in their toil presages as well an unforeseen and far more personal experience, "the experience of loss and desolation", a future bereft of Anchises.²¹

Anchises' pervasive influence, however, is exerted even from the realms of death, and expresses itself partly through the outcome of his prophetic exposition of Roman history (cf. 6.889), and partly through his recurring intervention in Aeneas' liaison with Dido, during which he repeatedly admonishes his son at the rising of the stars (4.352, *quotiens astra ignea surgunt*). For the immanence of the stars, though obliterated by Scylla's manifestations and by Etna's hostile radiance - though beset as it were by Polyphemus (3.619-620, *altaque pulsat/sidera*), and by the fury of the storm earlier incited by Juno (1.103, *fluctusque ad sidera tollit*) - has re-established its influence on the Trojans' destiny by virtue of the conduct of Achaimenides, whom they have encountered in Sicily. So Anchises' humane response to the castaway's entreaty (a supplication which attests to the influence of the stars (3.599, *per sidera testor*)), has enabled Achaimenides to become their guide for the remainder of the circuit round Sicily to Drepanum, from where the purposes of fate, unknowingly abetted by Juno, compel Aeneas onto the shores of Africa (cf. 3.715).

¹⁸ For further references to the guiding influence of the stars: 3.204, 567, 585 (the Trojans); 3.515; 5.25, 853; 6.338 (Palinurus); 2.694 (Anchises); 7.215 (Ilioneus); 10.160-162 (Aeneas and Pallas). Note too, how Beroe highlights the toil of the Trojans' seven years' wandering with reference to the stars (5.627-628) and how, when at last the Trojans see Italy, dawn has routed the guiding stars (3.521). Compare the analogous reference to the influence of the stars at 5.42 (prior to the funeral games).

¹⁹ Obstacles to the Trojans' mission, to their celestial destiny, are at times couched in terms of the stars: 1.103; 3.243, 423, 574, 619-620.

²⁰ See n. 3 above and consider, too, how the chimera on Turnus' helmet "breathes flames like those of Etna" (7.786).

²¹ Cf. Otis 1964:261.

Thus Aeneas' own, unpurposed cry to the stars (1.93, *duplicis tendens ad sidera palmas*), wrung from him while he is at the mercy of chaos during the elemental storm contrived by Juno, has elicited an influence of destiny in establishing his liaison with Dido, an encounter which proves to be the ultimate in his tribulation.

Before the crisis of her fated downfall, Dido has been engaged on a mission akin to Aeneas' own (4.322, *sidera adibam*; "I was advancing towards the stars"). And her predetermined destiny, too, is implicitly contrived, though with cruel irony, by the prescience of the stars, as revealed when she invokes them for solace from the abyss of her despair (4.519-520, *testatur moritura deos at conscia fati/sidera*; "poised to die, she called on the gods and on the stars which know the schemes of fate"). She even considers reversing the relentless orbit of the stars by means of sorcery (cf. 4.489, *vertere sidera retro*), though their midnight course evolves in total indifference to her anguish (4.524, *medio voluntur sidera lapsu*).

Virgil's narrative here reaches a compelling level of irony, for Dido's conception of the remoteness of Ethiopia "where mighty Atlas wheels on his shoulder the cosmic axis emblazoned with stars" (4.481-482) - the distant source of the magic she contemplates to forestall her doom - is restated by Anchises in his vision of the infinite dimensions of Rome's exaltation at 6.796-797, *ubi caelifer Atlas/axem umero torquet stellis ardentibus aptum*.²²

In her desperation, then, Dido repairs for her requital to the very source which threatens the complete destruction of everything she has ever achieved (cf. 1.22, *excidio Libyae*).

Aeneas' own vacillation in Carthage, again, though signified by the setting stars (2.9, *cadentia sidera*)²³ - consider the analogue of Dido's reaction to the story of his ordeal, which provokes her own disaster as the spirit of her infatuation takes possession of her (cf. 4.81, *cadentia sidera*)²³ - is repeatedly countered by Anchises, as we have seen, whenever the stars are in the ascendant (4.352).

Further, when Mercury challenges him, Aeneas, gripped by a sense of total awe, appeals to the stars himself (4.578-579, *sidera caelo/dextra feras*), invoking their aid in his absolute compliance with Jupiter's commands, conveyed to him by Mercury, to renounce his folly at once, to take up his destiny again, and to leave Carthage without delay (4.256-276; 560-570).

The irony of this theme develops to its climax in the underworld when Aeneas, confronted by Dido's ghost, swears by the stars themselves (6.458, *per sidera iuro*) that he rejected her unwillingly, and then adduces forces external to himself (the compulsion of heaven, prepared, as we have seen, through the stars) as the motivation accounting for the injustice which necessity has done her (6.456-464).

²² Cf. Evander's description of Atlas at 8.141, and compare 4.481-482 and 6.796-797 with n. 9 above.

²³ The waning stars would seem to be linked to Juno's sphere of action. Cf. Tiber's words to Aeneas at 8.59-60. Note too, the (symbolic) reference to the stars in the area of Dido's fate at 4.309, where she reproaches Aeneas for readying his fleet "under the stars of winter". Contrast the irony of Aeneas' reference to the stars in terms of Dido's renown at 1.608-609.

A conflict of their individual destinies, then, is inescapable by virtue of the circumstances of the two protagonists in the great design imposed on them by fate, the irrevocable purposes of which emanate from the mystical core of the stars, from the animating principle working within them (6.725-726, *Titaniaque astra/spiritus intus alit*).²⁴

Palinurus' cruel fate, again, decreed at Neptune's whim (5.815) and initiated by the agency of the stars (5.838), is likewise informed with elements of tragic irony. Thus, although Palinurus is an able sailor who knows the sea and sky (3.201-202) - he can therefore rely on the stars to lead the Trojans from Buthrotum (3.515) on towards Italy (6.338, *dum sidera servat*) and the end of their epic journey - he is obliged to question Neptune's intentions after the Trojans' departure from Africa (5.14), when a storm incited by heaven compels their return to Sicily, an event again successfully achieved by virtue of his knowledge of the stars (5.25, *servata remetior astra*; "I plot our way back by the stars I scanned before").

As his significance in the action dwindles,²⁵ then, Palinurus is made to appeal to the very god who later decrees his death (5.815), and although he guides the Trojans with unswerving integrity by means of the actual symbols of Rome's destiny²⁶ (5.853, *oculosque sub astra tenebat*), yet, the complicity of the stars is nevertheless instrumental in bringing about his end (5.838, *delapsus Somnus ab astris*; "the God of Sleep came gliding down from the stars").

The fate of Turnus, too, who is eventually brought to utter ruin by the gods (cf. 12.894-895),²⁷ issues from the stars, from their implicit links with chthonic forces. Thus, when Juno sends Iris down from heaven to incite him to action against the Trojans, Turnus raises his hands towards the stars (9.16-17, *duplicisque ad sidera palmas/sustulit*), and, provoked by the sight of stars fluctuating in the zenith of heaven (9.21, *palantisque polo stellas*), assents impetuously to the call to arms which must unavoidably compass his death.

Then again, thwarted by Juno's ruse to save him temporarily from an encounter with Aeneas (10.606-688), Turnus addresses himself once more to the stars (10.667, *duplicisque cum voce manus ad sidera tendit*), calling for death itself to countervail his unwitting defection from the arena of the war where his end is in preparation through the very medium of the stars. For the avoidance of a contest with Aeneas in Book 10, as Otis observes, provides the necessary motivation for Turnus' acceptance of the duel in Book 12,²⁸ an eventuality which terminates the war and consolidates the alliance between the Trojans and Latins, thus ensuring the inexorable catastrophe of the

²⁴ Anchises thus assigns a motive force, a pervasive spirit and mind, to the stars. Cf. Williams 1975:503. Their influence animates every aspect of the universe, but the dead, it seems, escape the emanation, as they have stars of their own (6.641). For Virgil's references to the prescience of the stars: 3.360 (Helenus), 4.519-520 (Dido), 9.429 (Nisus), 10.175-176 (Asilas), 11.259-260 (Minerva's star).

²⁵ On Palinurus' diminishing role in the action (his skills would be redundant in the Iliadic *Aeneid*), see Otis 1963:281.

²⁶ Aeneas himself assumes this task at 10.160-162, and is again guided by the stars (10.159-162).

²⁷ Cf. Williams 1987:124.

²⁸ See Otis 1963:317.

Romans to follow, as envisioned earlier by Latinus and prophesied to Aeneas by the *penates* (7.99-100 and 7.271-272, *nostrum/nomen in astra ferant*; 3.158, *tollemus in astra nepotes*). Hence the taunt which Aeneas flings at Turnus, with an insight born of fury, at the moment of crisis in the Latin war (12.892-893, *opta ardua pennis/astra sequi*; "grow wings and strive to follow the stars on high"). Even escape to the very stars - which Juno's provocation has enabled him briefly to glimpse (9.21) - must prove unavailing for Turnus.

Evander's son Pallas, when he proceeds to the arena of the Latin war, is fatefully compared to the brief incandescence of the morning star, Venus' delight (8.590, *quem Venus ante alios astrorum diligit ignis*). Pallas himself knows nothing of the stars, or of their influence on Aeneas' destiny, as we learn during his journey to the war:

hic magnus sedet Aeneas secumque volutat
eventus belli varios, Pallasque sinistro
adfixus lateri iam quaerit sidera, opacae
noctis iter, iam quae passus terraque marique.

(10.159-162)

"In the boat sat the mighty Aeneas, musing on the varied course of the war, while Pallas, stationed close to his left side, asked him now about the stars, the beacons of their way through the night, and now about his travail on land and sea."

Pallas' untimely death, nevertheless, is savagely avenged by Aeneas, as we have seen, in the final, ruthless act of the Latin war. His ultimate fate is thus obliquely linked to the eventual exaltation of the Romans, which depends, as the suppliant Turnus perceives, on an inviolable union between the Trojans and Latins (12.936-938).

So Jupiter himself, the arbiter of fate, remains indifferent to Evander's fervent prayer for Pallas (8.572-583); and the grieving Trojans, when they view the young prince's corpse, raise a cry of mortal anguish to the impervious stars, the remote home of Rome's exaltation (11.37, *ingentem gemitum ... ad sidera tollunt*).²⁹

When Nisus and Euryalus, finally, start out on their rash adventure, the circumstances of the episode, as described by Nisus, mirror the flames of the Latin war on a smaller scale; the two friends, intending to make contact with the absent Aeneas, plan to break through the Trojan camp by a gap in the watch-fires "where a pall of smoke rises to the stars" (9.239-240, *aterque ad sidera fumus/erigitur*).³⁰

Their venture, however, miscarries, and, after they have killed several Rutulians and plundered the bodies, Euryalus is taken prisoner. Nisus, watching the events in hiding, prays despairingly to Diana³¹ for a resolution of their plight:

tu, dea, tu praesens nostro succurre labori,
astrorum decus et nemorum Latonia custos.

(9.404-405)

²⁹ Cf. n. 12 above.

³⁰ Cf. n. 3 and n. 20 above.

³¹ For Diana's links with the stars, see also 7.767-768.

"Help us by your presence, goddess, help us in our crisis, glory of the stars, Latona's daughter, guardian of groves in the woods."

Then, when Euryalus is attacked by Volcens (one of his captors), Nisus, having since killed two Rutulians with spear-throws from his hiding-place, bursts out of the darkness, swearing that Euryalus is innocent of their deaths:

me, me, adsum qui feci, in me convertite ferrum,
o Rutuli! mea fraus omnis, nihil iste nec ausus
nec potuit; caelum hoc et conscia sidera testor ...

(9.427-429)

"I'm here, I did it, turn your steel on me, Rutulians! All the perfidy was mine, he dared nothing, he could do nothing. By heaven and the all-knowing stars I swear it ..."

Euryalus is killed before Nisus' eyes, however, and the latter, furious for revenge, charges into the closed ranks of the Rutulians, slaying Volcens even as he loses his own life.

Virgil's strikingly subjective account of the first episode of the war in Italy³² (the section probably supplies a corollary to Aeneas' killing of Turnus), is not designed merely to highlight Nisus' death "in all its dramatic force and pathos".³³ For the other bloody deaths in the incident, too, the indifference of Diana, and the implicit witness of the stars themselves, all these elements are conflated by Virgil to reveal the overall ravages of war in the fulfilment of Rome's destiny, and not simply to focus attention exclusively on the fate of Nisus or Euryalus.

VII

The stars, then, constitute an essential theme of the *Aeneid*. They represent the home of Rome's infinite destiny, the envisioned climax of the poem, the culmination of human endeavour in the historical process, notably for Aeneas and Augustus, but also for the Romans themselves, as perceived by Virgil in his conception of the nation's glory.

Paradoxically, again, the goal of the stars as the eventual fulfilment of individual merit, as the culmination of a vast historical continuum, presents itself in the *Aeneid* as the outcome of extended human suffering condoned or inflicted by heaven and activated above all by the ravages of war, the events of which are witnessed by the stars to which mortal cries, whether of anguish, entreaty or exaltation, rise up at various points in the action.

In a more confined sense, moreover, the stars are the beacons so to speak of Aeneas' wanderings, of his long quest for Italy, leading him on towards his own apotheosis after the Latin war and so ensuring the eventual catasterism of the Romans themselves in the wake of Augustus' triumph after Actium.

³² Cf. Williams (1987:62) on the Nisus-Euryalus story as the first episode of the Latin war.

³³ See Otis 1963:388.

In this context, again, the emanations of the stars, their universal and prophetic influence, assume a decisive role in the fortunes which Virgil assigns to prominent individuals in his narrative, notably to Aeneas and Anchises, Dido and Turnus, but also to lesser figures like Iulus and Pallas, Palinurus, Nisus and Euryalus.

It is above all stars or constellations (*astra*), groups of stars or constellations (*sidera*), and single stars or constellations (*sidus*), which influence the complex of themes in the *Aeneid*. Clusters of stars outside constellations (*stellae*), a single such star (*stella*), and the emanations of comets (*cometae*), also assume a role in this regard.³⁴

A word, finally, on Virgil's cosmology in the context of our theme. Recent studies of the cosmic elements in the *Aeneid* have tended to stress the propagandistic value of these features of the poem, especially in view of their recurrence in salient art-works and monuments of the Augustan age.³⁵ It would be unfair, however, to accuse Virgil of imperialist or Augustan partisanship in his use of stellar imagery in the *Aeneid*. His deployment of this theme tends rather, as we have seen, to vindicate the *Aeneid* as a consideration of the travail inherent in Rome's rise to military and historical greatness, as an evocation of the baffling intersection of the human and divine levels in the fulfilment of a preordained historical continuum which is marked by the terrible reprise of war. For the entire historical perspective of the poem is crowned, as we have tried to show, by the ultimate prize of catasterism in such a way as to embrace the whole perspective of human toil in Rome's history - the individual endeavours of Aeneas and Augustus, the common purpose of the Trojans and Romans - and the outcome of this vast trajectory is finally subsumed, in the light of Rome's military prowess, by Virgil's highly poetical vision of eventual peace, order and tranquillity on a universal scale.³⁶

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³⁴ There is no clear pattern in Virgil's choice of terminology to depict the influence of the stars in the *Aeneid*; *astra* and *sidera*, *sidus* and *stella* are used interchangeably under the various captions into which this essay is divided. See too, the material referred to in n. 1 above.

³⁵ Cf. Hardie 1986:377-386.

³⁶ Williams (1983:237) rightly excludes the *pax Augusta* from this context: "Peace in the poet's sense is an absolute value".

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NUNTII LATINI

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