

Repetition in the aeneid



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Repetition in the Aeneid Ancient Rome was highly dependent on repetition; a repetition of Greek Architecture, repetition of the Olympian Gods, and even a repetition of Greek Literature. This is not to say that Roman culture was a cheap knock-off of the Greece, for Romans strived to not only match Greece's rich culture but to rise above it. Virgil's The Aeneid is a fine example of the manner in which Romans aimed to glorify Rome by imitating Greece. The theme of repetition is crucial to Virgil's poem, particularly in Book VI, where history, myths, and tales reoccur or foretell an occurrence. Near the beginning of Book VI, we enter a temple dedicated to Apollo, and upon entering, our narrator reiterates the history that gave rise to this temple. It is significant that the history of a shire is described so meticulously, and in the beginning of the book—in a manner, interrupting the reader, and Aeneas (for he stops to admire the gates) from continuing on with the story. Not only does this bestow the notion of history with a sense of great importance in the poem, it insinuates that everyone must yield to history, even a great hero such as Aeneas. This brief history begins with the tale of the inventor/artist Daedalus, who escapes Minos' Kingdom by using a pair of man-made wings. Upon landing, he builds this temple and dedicates it to Apollo. The gates of the temple also feature many carvings depicting their history. What is most peculiar about that history is that it does not relate directly to Apollo or the temple's location, but to an altogether separate narrative and mythos. The historical account of Daedalus begins with the death of King Minos' heir, Androgeos. Upon the death of Androgeos at the hands of Athenians, King Minos punishes the citizens of Athens by demanding the sacrifice of seven young men and seven young women every year. The concept of a blood sacrifice appears multiple times throughout the

Aeneid, as every book mentions at least one blood sacrifice performed to the gods. However, the sacrifices performed by Aeneas characterize him as a pious and grateful servant to the gods because they are performed in honor of the gods. King Minos' human sacrifices are not performed in honor of the gods, but made to relieve his own grief and feed a monster conceived by sin. By demanding these yearly sacrifices to satisfy himself, Minos not only proves to be a cruel and brutal leader, but ascends (or seeks to ascend) to the status of an angry god. The scene of the "seven bodies" (Book VI, ln. 31) of the Athenian boys meant to feed the hungry Minotaur alludes to an earlier episode in Book I where Aeneas hunts seven stags to feed his hungry crew men. The language of the poem describes the stags as "seven giant bodies along the ground" (Book I, ln 267-8) and reveals that the stags were not only sacrificed to quit the hunger of his men, but also to "[soothe] their melancholy hearts" (Book I, ln. 275). The demand for the sacrifice of seven lives occurs once more while Aeneas is still before the carvings on the gate of Apollo's temple. Here, Deiphobe demands that Aeneas sacrifice seven steers from "a herd the yoke has never touched"(Book VI, ln. 55). This request refers back to the carving of the Athenian sacrifices, as the individuals sacrificed were young — like the steers — and perhaps even too young to truly partake in hard manual labor. The carvings on the temple's gate continue with the story of Pasiphaë and the Minotaur. The story of Pasiphaë is the story of a woman's extreme infatuation with a male, though not a human male, which leads her to commit the unthinkable; the narrator refers to this as a "polluted passion" (Book VI, ln. 37). This unyielding passion leads Pasiphaë to act unreasonably and parallels the passion of Dido for Aeneas in Book IV. (Spurned by her lover, Dido's passion becomes

polluted and lures her to indulge in her own emotions which yield her decision for suicide without regards for her kingdom or people.) Carved next on the gate is the story of Ariadne and Theseus. The scene depicts the intricate labyrinth crafted by Daedalus, and the manner in which Theseus manages to escape — using a solution proffered to him by Ariadne. It is important to note, however, that it is not merely Ariadne's love for Theseus that saves him, but Daedalus' pity for that love. (Daedalus is persuaded by it to disentangle the thread to lead Theseus out of the Minotaur labyrinth.) This episode portrays a triangular plot, as Theseus is trapped by Daedalus' creation, Ariadne attempts to help him out of it, and Daedalus helps Ariadne help Theseus. Other triangular plots occur throughout Aeneas' wanderings: the struggle between Venus, Aeneas, and Juno, to find and prevent Aeneas from finding Rome, and the love triangle between Aeneas, Turnus, and Lavinia. Although Ariadne's story as depicted on the gates ends with the release of Theseus, Ariadne's tale in its entirety is highly reminiscent of earlier events in Aeneas' journey. The story, according to Ovid, continues as Ariadne and Theseus sail off to the island of Dia. There Theseus, either by mistake or by technique, leaves Ariadne on the island while he sails away home. Upon watching him sail away without her, Ariadne utters a speech much like the one executed by Dido on Aeneas' departure in Book IV, in which she attempts to place a vengeful curse on Aeneas. Ariadne's story also alludes to the story of Creüsa's attempted escape from the burning Troy. When Aeneas leads his family out of the burning city, he has his wife Creüsa follow behind them; however, in the panic of being overtaken by Romans, Aeneas frantically flees from the aggressors without once thinking of Creüsa. It is not until he has secured his own safety and the safety of his father and

son that he attempts to find the woman he left behind. (Another who perished in the escape from his city is Daedalus' son, Icarus, whose wings melt apart when he flies too close to the sun. The narrator refers to Icarus with great regret, for Daedalus is too overcome with grief to carve his achievements into the gate. This is not the only regret however, as the narrator states that Icarus could have had a "great" [Book VI, ln. 44] part in Daedalus' work — insinuating that Icarus too could have grown up to be a great artisan/inventor like his father.) The themes of history and legacy are both very present in the artwork carved into the gates of Apollo's temple, as well as throughout the poem. The concept of immortalizing the history of one's people is especially important to the end of Book VIII, when Aeneas receives an "indescribable" (Book VIII, ln. 809) shield. This magnificent piece of armor is forged by Vulcan and offered to Aeneas as a gift from his divine mother. In this respect, the shield and the temple gate are very similar: both are gifts exchanged between gods and mortals. Just as the carved gates depict the story of Daedalus' people, so does Aeneas' shield illustrate the story of his future people and his future nation. What is significant about the timeline of both artworks is that Daedalus' art shows the past, insinuating that history is all he has or will ever have. With the death of his son Icarus also died his future and his legacy. Aeneas on the other hand, carries a shield which shows only the future — insinuating that his Trojan history has no part in the future of his people or his nation.