

*vermes Fremenque cano*—new *Dune*,<sup>1</sup> eternal recurrence, last god

“a saying of the same about the same is attempted.”<sup>2</sup>

As Harkonnen spacecraft depart from her home planet Chani’s voiceover says, “They ravage our lands in front of our eyes. Their cruelty to my people is all I’ve known. . . . But one day, by Imperial decree, they were gone.” Yet just as were the deserted shores of the Troad this absence is not how it seems. Rabban Harkonnen is back on Giedi Prime reporting to his uncle the Baron that the last of their ships has left Arrakis: “It’s done.” Rabban then bursts into rage at this humiliation of House Harkonnen—the Emperor has snatched Arrakis with its staggering spice-wealth away from them and bestowed it on Duke Leto Atreides. “How did we let this happen?” Rabban roars. The Mentat Piter de Vries calmly tells him, “Don’t be too sure it’s an act of love.” Rabban turns to the Baron, “What does he mean?” The old man replies in his gravelly voice with another question: “When is a gift not a gift?” When it’s treachery.<sup>3</sup>

Frank Herbert’s novel *Dune* tells the story of how the young nobleman Paul Atreides takes up his destiny of *Übermensch qua Superheld*: ‘the shortening of the way,’ ‘Kwisatz Haderach’ “in the old tongue.”<sup>4</sup> *Dune* is the kind of epic – the index case is the *Aeneid* – which celebrates the struggle for *imperium*, ‘power to command.’ The novel *Dune*, like the *Aeneid*, is all about destiny to power (*tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento* VI.851), and the 2021 film foregrounds this theme.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dir. Denis Villeneuve 2021.

<sup>2</sup> *wird über das Selbe je das Selbe zu sagen versucht*. Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* 65 GA 82; *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)* (tr. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu 2012) 65.

<sup>3</sup> *quidquid id est timeo Imperatorem et dona ferentem*. P. Vergilius Maro, *Aeneid* II.49 *mut. mut.* Herein all Latin verse quotations are from this poem. At line 43 Laocoon, aghast, asks his fellow Trojans gathered around the wooden horse, *creditis avectos hostis?* When, in the novel *Dune*, Thufir Hawat reports to the Atreides strategy council the amount of profit the Harkonnens have been extracting from Arrakis Duke Leto asks, “Is there anyone here so naive he believes the Harkonnens have quietly packed up and walked away from all this merely because the Emperor ordered it?” *Dune* (1965) 93; [https://archive.org/details/dune00herb\\_5/page/92/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/dune00herb_5/page/92/mode/2up).

<sup>4</sup> *Dune* 138. Cf. “But what is to come, the truth of beyng as refusal, contains the guarantee of vastness—not that of an empty and gigantic eternity, but that of the shortest path [*der kürzesten Bahn*].” *Contributions to Philosophy* 322. One complaint heard against David Lynch’s 1984 *Dune* is that this all-important designation comes only in the very last line of the movie, spoken by the child Alia and barely intelligible: “For he *is* the Kwisatz Haderach!” Intended I guess as the Big Reveal it baffled everyone not familiar with the novel. Villeneuve does not repeat that mistake.

<sup>5</sup> And it’s more than *ein bisschen nazimaßig*. The Imperium is feudal and the Great Houses rule their fiefs with private armies. Outside their billets Atreides and staff always dress in military uniform, with jackboots. The stylized-hawk insignia on Paul’s collar looks derived from the Armanen runes (‘Os’), the source for the *Schutzstaffel*’s. Their life, their rule, is on constant war-footing. In this white-hat/black-hat tale the characters on the Atreides side are excellent and noble yet the political structure they sustain is the warlordism of the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid*, and *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

So, in the movie, as Leto and Paul walk among the tombs of their ancestors before departing the homeworld Caladan for the new fief, father instructs son about the political danger ahead and the *kairos*, the main chance, it holds:

“The Great Houses look to us for leadership. This threatens the Emperor. By taking Arrakis from the Harkonnens and making it ours he sets the stage for a war which will weaken both houses [i.e., Atreides, revered for justice and valor,<sup>6</sup> and Harkonnen, feared for savagery and greed.<sup>7</sup>] But if we hold firm and tap the true power of Arrakis we could be stronger than ever.”

Ever more strength, ever more power. Paul demurs with a question, making the scene a double of that between Rabban and the Baron: “What does that mean? Mining spice? Keeping the Fremens in their place? We’d be no better than the Harkonnens.” Leto replies firmly:

“No. By making an alliance with the Fremens. Here on Caladan we’ve ruled by air power and sea power. On Arrakis we need to cultivate desert power.”

Arrakis stands as *cardo rerum*, a hinge in history, the possibility of vaster *regnum* from a source of power all former rulers of that planet have spurned—barbarians.<sup>8</sup> Leto tells Paul “I want you sitting in on my Council. Learn what I do.” (*disce puer virtutem ex me verumque laborem* XII.435) Paul, though, is only fifteen, and diffident. “What if I’m not, Dad?” “Not what?” “The future of House Atreides.” “Your grandfather said, ‘A great man doesn’t seek to lead. He’s called to it, and he answers.’”

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<sup>6</sup> In the novel the Great Houses address the Duke as ‘Leto the Just.’ *Dune* 100. Cf. *rex erat Aeneas nobis, quo iustior alter/ nec pietate fuit, nec bello maior et armis*. I.544-545. The Sibyl announces Aeneas to Charon as *pietate insignis et armis*. VI.403. *Passim* he is *pious Aeneas*. On the polarity *sapientia* and *fortitudo* in the *Aeneid* see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (tr. Willard R. Trask 1953; reissue 2013) 173-174.

<sup>7</sup> Predatory extraction was the due course of *regnum* in the heroic world as viewed through Roman eyes. Dido tells the Trojans that she heard about their war with the Greeks at the time when her father held Cyprus under foot as he drained off its riches: *genitor tum Belus opimam/ vastabat Cyprum et victor ditione tenebat*. I.621-622. The Harkonnens are like impious King Mezentius, *contemnor deum*, who held the city of Agylla *superbo imperio et saevis armis*; who bound living victims to corpses hand to hand and face to face, inflicting this cruelty *in misero longa morte*. VIII.481-488.

<sup>8</sup> In Boulainvilliers’s sense, as channeled by Foucault: “The barbarian, in contrast [to the savage], is someone who can be understood, characterized, and defined only in relation to a civilization, and by the fact that he exists outside it. There can be no barbarian unless an island of civilization exists somewhere, unless he lives outside it, and unless he fights it. And the barbarian’s relationship with that speck of civilization—which the barbarian despises, and which he wants—is one of hostility and permanent warfare. . . . He does not make his entrance into history by founding a society, but by penetrating a civilization, setting it ablaze and destroying it. . . . What is more, and unlike the savage, the barbarian is not a vector for exchange. The barbarian is essentially the vector for something very different from exchange: he is the vector for domination.” Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended”: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976* (tr. David Macey 2003) 395.

The movie combines the theme of summons to appropriation, *Zuruf des Ereignisses*,<sup>9</sup> with the theme of desert power in a single symbol—the crysknife. The action introduces this numinous instrument shortly after the Atrides forces land on Arrakis. Lady Jessica – the Duke’s concubine, Paul’s mother – is selecting a housekeeper for the family’s quarters in the citadel. The Fremen woman she chooses holds out to her a sheathed weapon, “meant as a gift if you are truly the one.” (That is, the *Lisan al-Gaib*, ‘the voice from the outer world;’ the mother and son foretold to lead the Fremen to Paradise.) The Fremen unsheaths the weapon and we get our first look at a blade about the length of a Bowie knife, but half as wide and the color of ivory, *ensis eburnus*. She asks, “Do you know this?” Jessica: “It’s a crysknife.” “Do you know its meaning?” “It’s a maker.” The Fremen wails at the impact-shock, *die Stoß*, of revelation. Recovering her composure, “A maker of the deep desert,” she says, sheathing the knife and placing it in Jessica’s hands. “It is yours. Tooth of *Shai-Hulud*.” The delivery of the line is ambiguous enough for us to understand both ‘It is for you, this tooth of *Shai-Hulud*,’ and ‘It is thine, thou Fang of God.’

Polt asks us to consider a kind of event

“that can happen only for an entity that makes sense of itself and its surroundings by way of its actions, and that can also change its way of acting and thus its understanding. A deep change in such an entity’s way of acting could be called a *reinterpretive* event. Such an event alters the agent’s own being as well as the agent’s interpretation of the world. . . . A reinterpretive event heightens or resolves a tension that affects its protagonist’s way of being someone in the world, and thus the course of his or her life. Such events are properly recounted in stories.”<sup>10</sup>

By the conventions of story-telling the tenor of the reinterpretive event may be disclosed in dreams and visions. So it is with Aeneas, who on the night in which Troy was betrayed dreams of Hector, foretelling Aeneas’ fate and rousing him to flee the burning city; and on this same desperate night has a vision of his late wife’s shade, who again foretells his fate and urges him to protect their young son.<sup>11</sup> So it is with Paul, a teenage boy who, on Caladan, has dreamed of a girl on Arrakis “many times,” as he tells Reverend Mother Mohiam.

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<sup>9</sup> *Beiträge zur Philosophie* 82.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Polt, *The Emergency of Being: On Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy* (2006) 78.

<sup>11</sup> The fate foretold—Hector: *sacra suosque tibi commendat Troia Penates;/ hos caepe fatorum comites his moenia quaere/ magna pererrato statuas quae denique ponto*. II.293-295. Creusa: *longa tibi exsilia et vastum maris aequor arandum;/ et terram Hesperiam venies ubi Lydius arva/ inter opima virum leni fluit agmine Thybris./ illic res laetae regnumque et regia coniunx/ parta tibi*. II.780-785.

The Reverend Mother has travelled to Caladan to inquire about Paul's dreams. "Do you often dream things that happen just as you dreamed them?" "Not exactly." At the end of this scene Paul overhears the Reverend Mother upbraiding Jessica, "but you in your pride thought you could produce the Kwisatz Haderach." "Was I wrong?" R.M.: "If he is the one he has a long way to go. His sight is barely awakened, and now he goes into the fire." 'The fire' is Arrakis and its 'emergency of being,' its mortal danger. After the Reverend Mother has departed Paul asks Jessica, "What did she mean I might be the one?" Here Jessica reveals to Paul the secret mission of the Bene Gesserit Order: "For thousands of years we have been carefully choosing bloodlines to bring forth a mind powerful enough to bridge space and time, past and future. Who can help us into a better future. We think he's very close now. Some [meaning herself] believe he's here [meaning Paul]."

The movie contrasts the *historische*<sup>12</sup> Bene Gesserit Jessica and her 'better future' with the *libido dominandi* Bene Gesserits who seek the Kwisatz Haderach only as the ultimate weapon in their campaign to rule the Imperium; the latter type instanced by the Reverend Mother Helen Gaius Mohiam herself, who conspires with the Emperor and Baron Harkonnen in the attempted destruction of House Atreides. In the fictional Imperium of *Dune*, if not elsewhere, "any law, whatever it may be, every form of sovereignty, whatever it may be, and any type of power, whatever it may be, has to be analyzed . . . in terms of the unending movement—which has no historical end—of the shifting relations that make some dominant over others. . . . Once we begin to talk about power relations we are not talking about right, and we are not talking about sovereignty; we are talking about domination, about an infinitely dense and multiple domination that never comes to an end. There is no escape from domination, and there is therefore no escape from history."<sup>13</sup> Heidegger writes that "A people is a people *only* if it receives its history as allotted to it through finding its god . . ." <sup>14</sup> And the only kind of god sought by the agonists of the Imperium is the kind that can vanquish the gods of others.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In Nietzsche's sense of *historischen Menschen*: "a glance into the past drives them on toward the future, inflames their courage to go on living, kindles their hope that justice will come, that happiness is waiting just the other side of the mountain they are approaching. These historical human beings believe that the meaning of existence [*der Sinn des Daseins*] will come ever more to light in the course of a *process*; . . ." "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life" in *Unfashionable Observations* (tr. Richard T. Gray 1991) § 1, p. 93.

<sup>13</sup> "Society Must Be Defended" 109, 111.

<sup>14</sup> *Contributions to Philosophy* 316. The gods will change, the war is forever. "No matter how far back it goes, historical knowledge never finds nature, right, order, or peace. However far back it goes, historical knowledge discovers only an unending war." "Society Must Be Defended" 172. Perhaps the war is unending because the gods ('enactors of meaning'), whatsoever they might at the moment be, are always irreconcilably opposed; e.g., *omnigenumque deum monstra et latrator Anubis/ contra Neptunum et Venerem contraque Minervam/ tela tenent*. VIII.698-700.

<sup>15</sup> The Latins go to Diomedes for help against the Trojan revenants and their loser gods, *victos penatis* (VIII.11); Father Tiber urges Aeneas to trust his *penates* as *certi* (VIII.39), i.e., sure to conquer.

After Paul arrives on Arrakis the planet's ubiquitous psychotropic spice brings him four visions.<sup>16</sup> An identical depiction of a crysknife appears in each of these visions; evidently the crysknife is not just a character in the story of Paul's 'choosing his fate,'<sup>17</sup> it *is* his fate ('His the sceptre, His the throne'). The crysknife even 'calls' insofar as a female voiceover is always associated with its appearance. In his first vision the voice whispers "Kwisatz Haderach awakes;" "Kwisatz Haderach, you can see." Recounting this vision to Jessica, Paul says, "It's confusing. I thought I saw my death only it wasn't." (Wasn't mine? Wasn't death?) "I know a knife is important somehow." Here the full-screen image of a crysknife lying on sand appears for the first time; the same image that will appear in subsequent visions. "Someone will hand me a blade, but I don't know who, or when, or where."

This first and two later visions disclose aspects of the same near-future event: Paul's acceptance of the crysknife from Chani for the climactic duel with the Fremmen Jamis. In that fight Paul kills Jamis and thereby, as the voice says, kills himself; that is, his innocent self, the boy Paul; and, as the voice enjoins, 'arises,' 'climbs up' as Kwisatz Haderach, the Hand of God.<sup>18</sup>

It is the second vision, of a distant future, which shakes Paul's being and induces in him a brief breakdown, a 'moment of de-rangement, *Verrückung*.'<sup>19</sup> Given the circumstances a breakdown is hardly surprising. The Atreides and their capital Arrakeen have been betrayed, and Harkonnens aided by the Emperor's Sardaukar troops are sacking the city and slaughtering Atreides soldiers. Paul and Jessica have been captured, and three Harkonnen henchmen are flying them into the desert for death there by natural causes, the Baron's plan for plausible deniability of their murder. With Paul's help Jessica kills all three. Mother and son then flee the downed aircraft and climb to a crest of dunes at dawn; they see in the distance the

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<sup>16</sup> A fifth, *ad hoc* one addresses the exigency of surviving a sandstorm in an ornithopter (more 'anisopter' in this movie's interpretation of that aircraft).

<sup>17</sup> *Die ergriffene Endlichkeit der Existenz . . . bringt das Dasein in die Einfachheit seines Schicksals*. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* 384; emphasis in original. *Einfachheit* suggests that 'choosing one's fate' is not to select from a pool of candidates, as in the myth of Er, but to embrace the destined one, *amor fati*. *et te tua fata docebo*. VI. 759.

<sup>18</sup> Jamis functions as a Turnus-figure insofar as he is the worthy opponent of the hero in the climactic duel. Virgil likens Turnus' frenzy anticipating the duel with Aeneas as that of a bull before the fight begins: *mugitus veluti cum prima in proelia taurus/ terrificos ciet atque irasci in cornua temptat/ arboris obnixus trunco, ventosque lacessit/ ictibus aut sparsa ad pugnam proludit harena*. XII.103-106. The passion of the Old Duke, Paul's grandfather, was bullfighting, and the movie makes sure we know it—a life-sized portrait of the Old Duke in his *toreador* costume, a statuette in Paul's room of a man fighting a bull, the bas-relief on the Old Duke's tomb, the head of the bull that killed him mounted on a wall, and Paul's remark to Leto, "Grandfather fought bulls for sport." So we are well prepared to see the flow of the fight with Jamis as *tanda* ("Is he toying with him?" Stilgar asks Jessica), and Paul's fatal blow – between the shoulderblades to the heart – as deft *estocada*.

<sup>19</sup> *The Emergency of Being* 116, citing *Beiträge zur Philosophie* 14.

*fumantia excidia* of Arrakeen. They take to the desert and encamp.<sup>20</sup> “There’s spice in the tent,” Paul says, coughing, and goes into a Sybilline trance, vocalizing the vision melting him down:

“That’s the future. It’s coming. Holy war spreading across the universe like unquenchable fire. Somebody help me, please. A warrior religion that waves the Atreides banner in my father’s name. Fanatical legions worshipping at the shrine of my father’s skull. A war in my name. Everyone’s shouting my name.”

This vision intimates the *topos* of ‘eternal recurrence.’ “This has all happened before,” as the Cylons say, “this will all happen again.”<sup>21</sup> For we have already seen a warrior religion of fanatical legions worshipping on the Tartarean planet Salusa Secundus, where the Emperor’s Sardaukar death-cult kneels battle-dressed in vast ranks before a ziggurat, *ferrea turris ad auras* VI.554. Atop the structure a priest, throat-singing in the Sardaukar language, presides over a ceremony of dedication-to-sacrifice. Officiants ladle from troughs at the base and mark the foreheads of the kneeling soldiers with blood. (*et tempora . . . summa notant pecudum* XII.173-174) We glimpse the source of the sacrament—men on their backs bound to the slopes, heads toward the base, their throats cut open bleeding in runnels to the troughs. In a double of Leto and Paul among the tombs Piter de Vries and a Sardaukar *bashar* walk among the ranks of the praying *morituri* which the novel calls “the dread Imperial troops, the killers without mercy, the soldier-fanatics of the Padishah Emperor.”<sup>22</sup> The *bashar* says (in Sardaukar) to Piter, “We are the Emperor’s blades. Those who stand against us fall.” I.e., the Sardaukar are the vector for the Emperor’s domination of the Imperium.

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<sup>20</sup> *fumantia Troiae excidia* (X.45-46). *iamque iugis summae surgebat Lucifer Idae/ ducebatque diem. Danaique obsessa tenebant/ limina portarum nec spes opis ulla dabatur./ cessi et sublato montis genitore petivi.* II.801-804. On the night of the *persis* Leto is awakened by a sudden silence—the citadel’s shields have powered off. Lying in bed he sees a light flicker across the bedroom wall, twice. He rises and looks out the window. All is darkness across the city save a single point of light in the distance, beyond the Shield Wall, blinking on and off. Recounting the *Ilioupersis* Aeneas says, *flammas cum regia puppis extulerat . . . laxat claustra Sinon.* ‘When the royal (Agamemnon’s) ship had raised up a fire-signal . . . Sinon opens the hatch (in the horse).’ II.256, 259. Heinze comments that “This is now usually understood not, with Heyne (referring to Seneca’s *Agamemnon* 427, *signum recursus regia ut fulsit rate* [when the signal for retreat shone from the king’s ship]), as the signal to depart, but as the signal to Sinon; correctly, in my opinion . . . The other sources have only the fire-signal given by Sinon, or by Antenor instead of him . . ., or by Helen {all from within Troy out to the Greeks; Helen’s signal at VI.518-519} . . . {Virgil} obviously feels the need to establish a connection between the fleet and Sinon, so as to explain the synchronization of their movements, and so he reverses the traditional motif. If one thinks about it, Sinon needs to have accurate information about the approach of the fleet, so as not to open the horse too soon.” Richard Heinze, *Virgil’s Epic Technique* ([3rd ed. 1915] tr. Hazel and David Harvey and Fred Robertson 1993) n. 27 pp. 52-53. The blinking light Leto sees, we see in retrospect, is the signal to Dr. Yueh (functional counterpart of Sinon) from the Harkonnens: ‘Ready here, down the shields.’ This traditional motif of the light-signal is not in the novel.

<sup>21</sup> *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009).

<sup>22</sup> *Dune* 26.



In a scene following the sack of Arrakeen Paul tells Liet Kynes that what the Great Houses fear most is “Exactly what has happened to us here. The Sardaukar coming and picking them off one by one.” Which, according to Paul’s vision, is exactly what the Kwisatz Haderach will do with the blades of his Fremen barbarians, his own ‘warrior religion of fanatical legions’: penetrate the Imperium, set it ablaze and destroy it—Trojan vengeance, *ultus avos Troiae* VI.840.

As for “Somebody help me, please,” the Kwisatz Haderach *qua Übermensch* must learn *nec spes opis ulla dabitur*. The overman, if really such, heeds the call *desine fata deum flecti sperare precando* (VI.376); hears *nec fibris requies datur ulla renatis* (VI.600) and says ‘Okay.’<sup>23</sup> In the concluding scene Jessica pleads with the Fremen leader Stilgar to help Paul get off the planet. Paul, choosing his fate, interrupts with a firm “No. The Emperor sent us to this place. And my father came. Not for spice, not for the riches, but for the strength of your people. My road leads into the desert. I can see it.” *longa mihi exilia et vastum harenae aequor arandum*. Paul has not borne the body of his father from Arrakeen, but his spirit—his vision of power and his piety to the *avi Atreidai*. So ends Villeneuve’s *Dune, Part One*, at a point about halfway through the novel. In terms of the *Aeneid*’s action, at the point where Aeneas makes alliance with the rustic Arcadians under old King Evander.

At its start the epigraph of the movie is spoken in Sardaukar over blackscreen: “Dreams come from the deep;” the abyss, *das Nichts*. In the *Aeneid* dreams, visions, omens, *prodigia*, and so on are communications of *fatum*. Heinze writes that “the truth which [Virgil] had to proclaim was the following:

“There is one divinity: Fate, which consists of both providence and reason, present in the whole of creation. This divinity guides men’s destinies, no-one can gainsay its will, at every moment everyone is at its mercy; a man’s duty is to follow his destiny willingly. . . . to the question *quid est boni viri?* [what is the duty of a good man?] Virgil gives exactly the same answer as Seneca: *praebere se fato* [to offer himself to fate] (*Dial.* 1.5.8), the Stoic requirement (which suits the Roman way of thinking so well), *sequi deum* [to follow god], is clearly revealed as the primary, not to say the only, obligation.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> In the otherwise unrecommendable *Troy* (dir. Wolfgang Petersen 2004) there is one perfect line of dialogue. Briseis sits weeping in Achilles’ tent as he sharpens a sword. “You lost your cousin,” she says (she means Patroclus). “Now you’ve taken mine” (she means Hector). “When does it end?” Achilles: “It never ends.” Now, as Heidegger puts it, “The crucial matter is that human beings come to exist who will not be shattered by this doctrine. Prior man is unable actually to think it. He thus must be made to transcend himself, to be transformed—into the overman.” Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same* (tr. David Farrell Krell 1984) 32. *daß Menschen werden, die an dieser Lehre nicht zerbrechen. Der bisherige Mensch vermag diese Lehre nicht wirklich zu denken; er müßte denn über sich hinausgebracht und verwandelt werden—zum Übermenschen.*

<sup>24</sup> *Virgil’s Epic Technique* 235, 240-241. The *Aeneid* is composed of 9896 lines, give or take a few depending on the judgment of editors. The word ‘*fata*’ in some form occurs on average every 60 lines.

Certainly the most salient feature of the *Aeneid's* literary afterlife has been its account of the afterlife. By that account fate fixes on human being the 'appointment to *samsara*.'<sup>25</sup> As Norden says the τόπος περιὶ παλιγγενεσίας of Book VI is essential to Virgil.<sup>26</sup> Yet we have to keep in mind that for Virgil the unit of utmost concern is Rome: Troy returns to greater glory as Rome, and the reincarnated souls who will accomplish it are of secondary import.<sup>27</sup>

The τόπος περιὶ παλιγγενεσίας undergoes radical reinterpretation through the insight which struck Nietzsche in August 1881. "The notion of revelation," Nietzsche wrote, "—in the sense that suddenly, with ineffable assuredness and subtlety, something becomes *visible*, audible, something that shakes you to the core and bowls you over—provides a simple description of the facts of the matter." The matter of the reinterpretive event. The content of the insight was the basic conception, *die Grundconception*, of the Zarathustra book; namely, the thought of eternal recurrence, *der Ewige-Wiederkunfts-Gedanke*, "this highest attainable formula of affirmation," *diese höchste Formel der Bejahung, die überhaupt erreicht werden kann*.<sup>28</sup>

In Nietzsche's first account of eternal recurrence under that name the thought is announced by a *Dämon*: "What if a *daimon* said to you . . ." What would you do? Would you collapse in horror, cursing the Annunciation? Or have you had an uncanny (*ungeheuren*) moment when

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<sup>25</sup> At least until the supply of souls runs out. The souls who have sinned the worst in life are consigned to Tartarus for eternal punishment (*sedet aeternumque sedebit/ infelix Theseus* VI.617-618). The rest go to Elysium, where a few, *pauci*, are completely purged of imperfections clinging to their fiery essence: *donec longa dies perfecto temporis orbe/ concretam exemit labem purumque relinquit/ aetherium sensum atque aurai simplicis ignem*. VI.743-745. This happy few then remains forever in Elysium. Most, on the other hand, endure a thousand years of purgation in Elysium only to be returned, having drunk from the river Lethe, to earthly life. So, unless the cosmic *spiritus-mens* (VI.726-727) generates new souls – and Virgil is silent on that – the supply of souls for earthly life will be slowly exhausted by resampling and elimination. Alternatively, the best and the worst having been filtered out the middling sort are recycled in perpetuity because to this velcro type *semper aliquid haeret*. See Friedrich Solmsen, "The World of the Dead in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*," 67 *Classical Philology* 31 (1972).

<sup>26</sup> *da für Cicero der τόπος περιὶ παλιγγενεσίας Nebensache, für Vergil wesentlich ist*. Eduard Norden, *P. Vergilius Maro Aeneis Buch VI* (1903) 48.

<sup>27</sup> "Virgil is dealing not with Aeneas' personal destiny, but with the mission which he embodies [and to be embodied by the souls in the Parade of Heroes at VI.760 *et seq.*], and the final goal of this mission was the present fortunate state of affairs visible to every reader of the *Aeneid*: the rule of peace in Augustus' universal empire." *Virgil's Epic Technique* 242. 'Peace' after discounting for frontier warfare, internal revolts, and mass slavery.

<sup>28</sup> *Der Begriff Offenbarung, in dem Sinn, dass plötzlich, mit unsäglicher Sicherheit und Feinheit, Etwas sichtbar, hörbar wird, Etwas, das Einen im Tiefsten erschüttert und umwirft, beschreibt einfach den Thatbestand*. *Ecce Homo* (tr. David Large 2007) 'Why I write such good books: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*' 3, p. 68 and 1, p. 65. But the gist of eternal recurrence already appears in the second of the *Unfashionable Observations* in the contrast of *der überhistorische Standpunkt* with *die historischen Menschen*: "Anyone who asks his acquaintances whether they would like to relive the last ten or twenty years will easily recognize which of them are suited for that suprahistorical standpoint. To be sure, they will answer 'No!,' but they will give different reasons for this answer. Some, perhaps, by consoling themselves with the claim 'but the next twenty years will be better.' . . . We shall call them historical human beings . . ." "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life" § 1, p. 93.



you could answer, “You are a god, and never have I heard a thing more godlike.”<sup>29</sup> Implied: “and I never will.” For Nietzsche nothing exceeds the godlikeness of eternal recurrence. Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence is the descendant, or recurrence, of Virgil’s divine fate; *non flectenda fata deum*.

Of course for Nietzsche there was no question of ‘providence and reason,’ no cosmic spirit-mind; “the whole of history,” he believed, “is experiential refutation of the principle of the so-called ‘moral world-order’ [„sittlichen Weltordnung“].”<sup>30</sup> The metaphor of eternal recurrence points instead to a kind of symmetry; that Nietzsche’s unit of utmost concern, the human condition, *fibrae* of self-aware finitude, is conserved (*renatae*) under change (history).<sup>31</sup>

Similarly for Heidegger’s last god of the *Beiträge*, Polt says, “There is no redemption here, no salvation or solution as dissolution (*Er-losung*),” no “illusory escape.”<sup>32</sup> So also with the overman, *der Sinn der Erde*. “Stay true to the Earth,” Zarathustra teaches, “and don’t believe those who speak to you of hopes beyond Earth.”<sup>33</sup> Polt remarks that “The whole discussion of the final god has a Nietzschean flavor: Heidegger accepts Nietzsche’s claim that the Christian god is dead, and the possibility of being-there loosely resembles the possibility of the overman as an alternative to the last man.”<sup>34</sup> Yet Nietzsche’s claim in Zarathustra’s mouth is “*All gods are dead*.”<sup>35</sup> “One used to say God . . . now I have taught you to say overman. . . . So let’s knock it off about all gods.”<sup>36</sup>

Due to well-known facts of his *Geworfenheit* Heidegger could not knock it off about gods. Succeeding the Christian god of his upbringing and early career there comes the *Beiträge*’s last

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<sup>29</sup> „du bist ein Gott und nie hörte ich Göttlicheres!“ *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* ¶ 341.

<sup>30</sup> *Ecce homo: Warum ich ein Schicksal bin*, § 3 (1889).

<sup>31</sup> “Suprahistorical human beings . . . do arrive at unanimity with regard to the statement: the past and the present are one and the same [*Eines und dasselbe*]. That is, in all their diversity, they [past and present] are identical in type [*in aller Mannichfaltigkeit typisch gleich*], and as the omnipresence of imperishable types [*als Allgegenwart unvergänglicher Typen*] they make up a stationary formation [*ein stillstehendes Gebilde*] of unalterable worth and eternally identical meaning [*ewig gleicher Bedeutung*].” “On the Utility and Liability of History for Life” § 1, p. 94. The suprahistorical person then, for whom “the world is complete and has arrived at its culmination in every individual moment,” “does not seek salvation in a process.” *Ibid*.

<sup>32</sup> *The Emergency of Being* 209.

<sup>33</sup> *bleibt der Erde treu und glaubt Denen nicht, welche euch von überirdischen Hoffnungen reden! Also sprach Zarathustra I: Vorrede*, § 3.

<sup>34</sup> *The Emergency of Being* 210 fn. 117.

<sup>35</sup> „**Todt sind alle Götter: nun wollen wir, dass der Übermensch lebe.**“ — *diess sei einst am grossen Mittage unser letzter Wille! Also sprach Zarathustra I: Von der schenkenden Tugend*, § 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Einst sagte man Gott, wenn man auf ferne Meere blickte; nun aber lehrte ich euch sagen: Übermensch. Gott ist eine Muthmaassung; aber ich will, dass euer Muthmaassen nicht weiter reiche, als euer schaffender Wille. Könntet ihr einen Gott schaffen? — So schweigt mir doch von allen Göttern! Also sprach Zarathustra II: Auf den glückseligen Inseln.*

god, which Polt calls “this ultimate and most riddlesome strait of appropriation.”<sup>37</sup> And later emerge the Fourfold’s divinities, which Mitchell says “enact meaning.”<sup>38</sup>

If we really must have an image of the divine consider this passage from the final section of *The Death of Vergil*:

“And now the well-spring of the waters also became visible, their deepest root-abyss, the fountain within the fountain, and there in the uttermost depths of the fountain lay the serpent itself, rainbow-colored yet transparent as ice, closed to a time-cycle, coiled around the nothingness of the middle.”<sup>39</sup>

The serpent anciently ‘true to the Earth’ is ‘true to the sand’ in *Dune* as the Old Man of the Desert, uncanny *Shai-Hulud*. If we see the serpent of history as unending movement without goal, coiling around and ever passing by “the nothingness of the middle” – *die völlige Unbedeutsamkeit; wesentlich eine Nichtigkeit*<sup>40</sup> – then the whole dynamics of *Schlange-Nichts-Zeitkreis* may be a serviceable representation of eternal recurrence as, if you want, the last god.

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<sup>37</sup> *The Emergency of Being* 213.

<sup>38</sup> Andrew J. Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger* (2015) 205.

<sup>39</sup> Hermann Broch, *The Death of Vergil* (tr. Jean Starr Untermeyer [1945] 1983) 468. *Und da ward auch der Brunnengrund der Gewässer sichtbar, ihr tiefster Wurzelabgrund, der Brunnen innerhalb der Brunnen, und dort, in des Brunnens tiefster Tiefe, lag regenbogenfarbig, dennoch eisig durchsichtig, zum Zeitkreis geschlossen die Schlange selber, die Schlange geringelt um das Nichts der Mitte.* On snake-trope in the *Aeneid* see Bernard M. W. Knox, “The Serpent and the Flame: The Imagery of the Second Book of the *Aeneid*,” 71 *The American Journal of Philology* 379 (1950).

<sup>40</sup> *Sein und Zeit* 187, 285.