This chapter discusses the function of the imperfect in the Latin tense system, and its use in the different discourse modes. Just as in the case of the present and perfect tense, all interpretations of the imperfect tense can be explained from its semantic value on the one hand and the discourse mode and base on the other. The imperfect tense is used in the narrative mode, in report and transposed report, and has a very important role in the description mode. The imperfect tense also occurs in sequences presented in the directing mode, but this does not necessarily mean that these imperfect tense forms should be regarded as taking a base in reference time: the case of the imperfect seems more complicated in this respect than that of the perfect tense (see §3.4).

Traditionally, the imperfect tense is seen as a ‘background tense’. I will discuss this background role of the imperfect in the sections on the narrative mode (§4.2) and the description mode (§4.3), and in §4.10 in which I will contrast the imperfect with the perfect by way of conclusion of chapters 3 and 4.

The total number of indicative imperfect tense forms in the Aeneid is 583, of which 56 occur in direct speech. The remaining 527 imperfect tense forms are the subject of this chapter. The present chapter differs from the preceding chapters in that a number of subjunctive forms of the imperfect tense will be discussed separately (§4.8), as these nicely illustrate the availability of reference time as a base.

### 4.1. Semantic Value of the Imperfect Tense

In this section, I discuss the semantic value of the imperfect tense and claim that the ‘imperfective’ aspect that has often been ascribed to the imperfect tense is, in fact, a result of this semantic value. In some cases, the imperfect does not even represent an imperfective or unbounded state of affairs, as example (4) and (5) will illustrate.

The imperfect tense indicates that a state of affairs is contemporaneous with an orientation moment in the past of the moment of speech or base (Pinkster 1983:300; 1990:227). It has often been stated that the imperfect tense indicates imperfective aspect in the sense that the imperfect denotes ‘unfinished’ or unbounded states of affairs (e.g. Kühner-Stegmann (1912 2.I: 122)), but I would rather follow Pinkster in his view that this imperfective aspect is a result from the semantic value of the imperfect. This may be explained by means of the imperfect tense form habebat in example (1). The orientation moment with which habebat is contemporaneous is made explicit by means of the perfect tense form adfata (est).

Example (1), 4.631 – 632

\[\text{tum breuiter Barcen nutricem } \text{adfata}\text{ Sychaei, namque suam patria antiqua cinis ater } \text{habebat}:\]

Then briefly she addressed Barce, the nurse of Sychaeus, for the pyre’s black ashes held her own back in her country of long ago.

The fact that habebat is contemporaneous to adfata makes us assume that the state of affairs habebat had already started before adfata and is continuing after adfata, and this assumption leads to an unbounded interpretation of habebat.

So, due to the fact that an imperfect tense form is contemporaneous with an orientation moment in the past, a reader may assume that the state of affairs already started in the orientation moment and ends after the orientation moment, which leads to an unbounded...
interpretation. An imperfect tense form will, therefore, usually represent a situation taking place in the past of the base.\footnote{That is, unless the context indicates otherwise. See example (4) and (5) for imperfect tense forms that represent events because the context provides boundaries.}

In §2.3.1, I explained the two notions boundedness and telicity. A state of affairs can, for instance, be atelic and unbounded, as is the case in example (1). The state of affairs nutricem cinis habebat does not have an inherent endpoint and therefore is atelic. However, a state of affairs can also be \textit{telic} and unbounded. A state of affairs that is telic and unbounded \textit{has} an inherent endpoint, but this endpoint is not reached. The semantic value of the imperfect tense usually evokes an unbounded \textit{and unfinished} interpretation in the case of telic states of affairs. An example is found in book 7 when Latinus is slaying hundred sheep. The act of slaying a specific number of animals has a natural endpoint, which means that we are dealing with a telic state of affairs.

Example (2), 7.93 – 94

hic et tum pater ipse petens responsa Latinus centum lanigeras \textit{mactabat} rite bidentis, atque harum effultus tergo stratisque \textit{iacebat}\footnote{The state of affairs \textit{iacebat} is puzzling in combination with \textit{mactabat}: despite the use of the imperfect tense these states of affairs cannot be contemporaneous with each other. My explanation would be that the states of affairs are alternated: Latinus slaughters, rests and then slaughters some more.} uelleribus:

By means of the imperfect tense, the state of affairs \textit{mactabat} is presented as contemporaneous with an orientation moment in the past. This orientation moment in the past coincides with reference time (see §4.2). This means that during reference time, Latinus is in the process of slaying one hundred animals, an at this point in the story unfinished and unbounded state of affairs. Thus, the semantic value of the imperfect tense leads to an unfinished interpretation of this state of affairs.

The semantic value of the imperfect tense may, in combination with specific indications in the context, also lead to an iterative interpretation, as is the case in example (3). The verb \textit{mutare}, meaning ‘to change’ or ‘to shift’, is a typical achievement, indicating a change from one state into another. In the passage below, Aeneas does not know whether he should stay in Sicily, as part of his crew wants, or whether he should go to Italy. Aeneas changes his mind constantly, sometimes favoring the first option \textit{(nunc huc)}, sometimes the latter \textit{(nunc illuc)}.

Example (3), 5.702-705

At pater Aeneas casu concussus acerbo \textit{nunc huc} ingentis, \textit{nunc illuc} pectore curas \textit{mutabat} uersans, Siculisne resideret aruis oblitus fatorum, Italasne capesseret oras. But father Aeneas, stunned by the bitter blow, now this way, now that, within his heart turned over mighty cares, pondering whether, forgetful of fate, he should settle in Sicilian fields, or aim to reach Italian shores.

The imperfect tense form \textit{mutabat} is contemporaneous with reference time, which means that in reference time Aeneas is ‘changing’. The state of affairs is telic, and an imperfect tense form on its own would, as in example (2), be interpreted as unfinished: Aeneas would be in the process of changing. However, the addition \textit{nunc huc} ... \textit{nunc illuc} evokes an iterative interpretation: this state of affairs consists of many repetitions of ‘changing’, all taking place in reference time (cf. Oldsjö 2001:216).

Summarizing thus far, we can say that an imperfect tense form may evoke an unbounded interpretation because of the context and the meaning of the verb, but that
interpretation should not be equated with the semantic value of the imperfect tense. A number of instances of the imperfect tense in my material does not represent unbounded states of affairs. In these cases, the context provides explicit boundaries, and the state of affairs is an event (see §2.3.1). In example (4), it is the perfect tense form *fuit* that indicates the boundaries for the states of affairs *poterant* and *ferebat*: *poterant* and *ferebat* are contemporaneous with the past existence of a cave.\(^{139}\)

Example (4), 6.237 – 240

spelunca alta *fuit* vastaque immansis hiatu,
scrupea, tuta lacu nigro nemorumque tenebris,
quam super hauð uillac *poterant* impune uolantes
tendere iter pennis: talis sese hali tus atri
faucibus effundens supera ad conuexa *ferebat*.

A deep cave there was, yawning wide and vast, of jagged rock, and sheltered by dark lake and woodland gloom, over which no flying creature could sagely wing their way; such a vapour from those black jaws was wafted to the vaulted sky.

The perfect tense form *fuit* is part of the report mode and presents the fact that in the past of the time of narration a certain cave existed (§3.3). During this time, birds could not fly over it, and this is what the imperfect tense form expresses. It does *not* express that the states of affairs *poterant* and *ferebat* were going on before and after this existence of the cave and, therefore, does not indicate that these states of affairs are unbounded with respect to their orientation moment.

Another example of a bounded state of affairs is the state of affairs *linguebat* in (5), which has been provided with boundaries in the form of the adverbial clause *simul his dictis*. Camilla is dying, and as she speaks her last words, the reins slip from her hands.

Example (5), 11.823 – 831

‘hactenus, Acca soror, potui: nunc uulnus acerbum
conficit, et tenebris nigrescunt omnia circumb.
effuge et haec Turno mandata nouissima perfier:
succedat puguue Troianosque arceat urbe.
iamque uale.’ *simul his dictis linguebat* habenas
ad terram non sponte fluens. tum frigida toto
paulatim exsoluit se corpore, lentaque colla
et captum leto posuit caput, arma relinquens,
uitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras.

“So far, sister Acca, has my strength availed; now the bitter wound overpowers me, and all around grows dim and dark. Hurry away, and bring to Turnus my latest orders: to take my place in the battle, and ward off the Trojans from the town. And now farewell!” With these words she dropped the reins, slipping helplessly to earth. Then, growing chill, she slowly freed herself from all the body’s bonds, drooped her nerveless neck and the head which Death had seized, letting fall her weapons, and with a moan her life fled resentfully to the Shades below.

The example shows that an imperfect tense form does not necessarily represent an *unbounded* state of affairs: the imperfect tense form *linguebat* is contemporaneous with a past orientation moment, but not unbounded with respect to this past orientation moment. That is to say, *linguebat* does not imply that the slipping of the reins starts before *his dictis*, and continues afterwards. Rather, the state of affairs in the imperfect tense seems to ‘fill in’ the time indicated by means of *his dictis*. The relaxation of the reins takes as long as Camilla speaks.

The use of the imperfect tense here has a particular narratological effect: a telic state of affairs is ‘stretched’, by means of the used tense form and, as a result, the state of affairs *linguebat* describes how the reins slowly slip from Camilla’s hands.\(^{140}\) As such, this

\(^{139}\) For perfect tense forms providing the ‘boundaries’ for an imperfect, see, for example, 4.458; 6.239; 7.538; 8.194. Boundaries may also be denoted by means of a pluperfect tense form: 12.520; 12.768. Other types of boundaries (i.e. adverbial clauses) are found at 2.344; 2.456 (*solebat* and *trahebat*); 2.472; 3.140; 4.458; 6.167; 6.239; 7.538; 8.149, see also below.

\(^{140}\) Fordyce (ad 7.571) argues from this imperfect tense form to explain the imperfect *levabat* in 7.571. In my opinion, however, these imperfect tense forms are not comparable, since in 7.571 no indication of an ongoing *levare* is given, such as *simul his dictis* here. I would therefore read *levavit* instead of *levabat* in 7.571. See §8.2.1 for a more elaborate discussion of 7.571.
presentation makes that the reader is, as Conington puts it (ad 7.571), ‘meant to dwell on the gradual relaxation of Camilla’s grasp in death’. This example shows that the imperfect tense may be used to express an inherently swift type of action as taking up a remarkable part of narrative time.\textsuperscript{141}

In short, the semantic value of the imperfect tense is to indicate that a state of affairs is contemporaneous with a past orientation moment. Often, this value leads to an unbounded interpretation of an imperfect tense form, but in some cases the context provides boundaries and the states of affairs expressed by the imperfect tense are bounded (60 cases in the \textit{Aeneid}).

One last observation with respect to the semantic value of the imperfect tense I would like to make is that the end of some states of affairs expressed by the imperfect is implicit to such an extent that the state of affairs ‘never stopped’. That is, some imperfect tense forms seem to express states of affairs that continue until present times. An example is found in book 7, when Latinus refuses to declare war on the Trojans, and flees into his castle. Then, the narrator informs his readers about the ancient custom of opening the ‘Gates of War’, the history of which is presented in a reported sequence. The first clause, \textit{mos erat Hesperio in Latio}, is, however, not presented in the report mode. It is, as I will explain in the next section, \textit{narrated information}.

\textbf{Example (6), 7.601 – 606}

\begin{align*}
\textit{Mos erat Hesperio in Latio}, quem protinus urbes Albanae coluere sacrum, nunc maxima rerum Roma colit, cum prima mouent in proelia Martem, siue Getis inferre manu lacrimabile bellum Hyrcanisue Arabisue parant, seu tendere ad Indos Auroramque sequi Parthosque reposere signa: …
\end{align*}

As the report mode is used in the rest of this sequence, one might have expected the perfect tense form \textit{fuit} here. My explanation is that \textit{fuit} would represent this custom too strongly as a thing of the ancient past, a custom over and done with, whereas the imperfect tense form \textit{erat} suggests that the custom is still in use in the time of narration, as the clause \textit{nunc maxima rerum/ Roma colit} shows. Apparently, the imperfect tense can be used to refer to the past part of a state of affairs that is also contemporaneous with the ‘present’ (cf. §4.6).\textsuperscript{142} This is due to the fact that an imperfect tense form does not give information about the endpoint of a state of affairs. It only tells us that a state of affairs was contemporaneous with a time in the past.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{141} There is only one other occurrence of the verb \textit{linguere} in the imperfect in the \textit{Aeneid}: 3.140, where \textit{linguebant} should be interpreted as an iterative state of affairs. The database \textit{Bibliotheca Teubneriana Latina} shows that \textit{linguere} is used only 8 times in the imperfect tense, whereas the total amount of the use of \textit{linguere} in the present stem is 268, in the perfect stem (active) 102. The verb \textit{relinguere} is used 74 times in the imperfect tense, against a total amount of 1828 occurrences in the present stem and 1635 occurrences of active forms in the perfect stem.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{142} This use of the imperfect tense is found in direct speech as well, for instance in the following passage, taken from Pinkster (1990: 227). \textit{(Eutychus:) quo nunc ibus? :: (Charinus:) exulatum (Pl.Merc.884)} (Where were you going just now? :: Into exile). The imperfect describes a situation which partly took place in the past of the communicative situation, yet at the same time continues in this communicative situation \texttt{(nunc):} Eutychus has just stopped Charinus, who is evidently on his way to somewhere. According to Kühner-Stegmann(1912: II.1, 123) the speaker, using the imperfect tense in this way, places himself into the particular time in the past in which he first recognized this state of affairs (Kühner-Stegmann, however, do not mention this particular passage as an example of this use of the imperfect) This time in the past is in these cases more relevant to the speaker than the ‘present’ is. For examples in the \textit{Aeneid} see 9.270, 10.608; 11.154 and 12.259.}
In the narrative mode, past states of affairs are presented in relation to each other. As I explained in chapter 3, the perfect tense is used to express the events on the time line of the story. In this section, I argue that the imperfect tense is used in the narrative mode to present the situations that are part of the time line of the story, and explains how this interpretation is connected to the semantic value of the imperfect tense. In case of the imperfect tense in the narrative mode we may make a distinction between states of affairs which are part of the narrative proper and those states of affairs that are additional information. I refer to the latter states of affairs with the term *narrated information*, as I will discuss in §4.2.1.

In the narrative mode, a story is told that took place in the past of the base. This story, as every story, consists of a series of reference times, and these reference times are in the past of the base. These reference times can function as the past orientation moment with which a state of affairs in the imperfect tense is contemporaneous. The imperfect tense often evokes the interpretation that the state of affairs had already started before reference time and continues after reference time, as was illustrated by the imperfect tense forms *mactabat* and *iacebat* in example (2), here quoted as (7).

Example (7), 7.85 – 95
hinc Italae gentes omnisque Oenotria tellus in dubiis responsa petunt; huc dona sacerdos cum tulit et caesarum oviim sub nocte silenti pellibus incubuit stratis somnosque petuit, multa modis simulacra uident uolitantia miris et uarias audit uoces fruiturque deorum conloquio atque imis Acheronta adfatur Auernis. hic *et tum* pater ipse petens responsa Latinus centum lanigeras *mactabat* rite bidentis, atque harum effultus tergo stratisque *iacebat* uelleribus: subita ex alto uox *reddita* luco est:

From this place the tribes of Italy and all the Oenotrian land seek responses in days of doubt; to it the priestess brings the offerings, and as she lies under the silent night on the outspread fleeces of slaughtered sheep and woos slumber, she sees many phantoms flitting in wondrous wise, hears many voices, holds converse with the gods, and speaks with Acheron in lowest Avernus. Here then, also, King Latinus himself, seeking an answer, duly slaughtered a hundred woolly sheep, and lay couched on their hides and outspread fleeces. Suddenly a voice came from the deep grove:

In this example, *et tum* indicates the transition from a more general description of an Italic custom to Latinus performing this custom at a specific occasion. The imperfect tense forms *mactabat* and *iacebat* are used to indicate what was going on in the reference time to which we return, before the narrator narrates the event of *uox reddita est*. This example nicely illustrates the difference between the perfect tense and the imperfect tense *within the narrative mode*: the perfect tense denotes bounded states of affairs (events), whereas the imperfect usually denotes unbounded states of affairs (situations).143

The words *et tum* in line 91 do not only indicate the return from general information to the story, they also are an explicit indication of the reference time with which the imperfect tense forms are contemporaneous. Such an explicit indication of the reference time is, however, not indispensable since, in a story, reference time is always available as an implicit orientation moment for an imperfect tense form (cf. Mellet 1988:101 & 144). This is proven by the example below, in which the state of affairs denoted by means of an imperfect tense form indicates what is taking place in the reference time in which this scene starts: *nox erat*

---

143 Apart from the opposition between the imperfect and the perfect tense in the narrative mode, other oppositions between the imperfect and the perfect tense exist as well, e.g. that between their use in the narrative and the report mode as I will explain in §4.10.4.
and *sopor habebat* are taking place at the moment in which we enter the scene of the river Tiber and Aeneas.

Example (8), 8.26 – 30

Nox *erat et terras animalia fessa per omnis alituum pecudumque genus sopor altus habebat*, cum pater in ripa gelidique sub aetheris axe Aeneas, tristi turbatus pectora bello, *procubuit seramque dedit per membra quietem.*

It was night, and over all lands deep sleep held wearied creatures, birds and beasts alike, when father Aeneas, his heart troubled by woeful war, lay down on the bank under the vault of cold sky, and let sleep at last steal over his limbs.

In this scene, the god of the river Tiber talks to Aeneas, and the imperfect tense forms *habebat* and *erat* provide a frame for the event of Aeneas laying down, the perfect tense form *procubuit*. Such a framing construction at the start of a scene may be compared to a ‘fade in’ in films. This narratological effect has often been mentioned as a typical feature of the imperfect tense (e.g. Pinkster 1983:304), usually embedded in a discussion of the imperfect as a backgrounding tense.

The imperfect tense may indeed be seen as a backgrounding tense within the narrative mode, as becomes clear when we look at its particular use in this mode. The imperfect tense is often used for frames and stationary states of affairs within the narrative mode, as may be observed from the table (see also table 5 in §2.1.5). As I explained in §1.1.1.1, frames and stationary states of affairs together provide the ‘background’ against which the ‘foregrounded’, reference time advancing states of affairs take place.

| Table 1: The imperfect tense and the advancement of reference time in the narrative mode |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Advancing | 7 |
| Stationary | 63 |
| Frame | 51 |
| Total | 121 |

The imperfect tense forms in example (7) and example (8) are framing states of affairs, and the next examples will illustrate how the imperfect tense represents stationary states of affairs (examples (9) and (10)) and advancing states of affairs (example (11)).

An example of a stationary state of affairs represented by means of an imperfect tense form is the verb form *rigebant* in example (9). Entellus has decided to compete in a boxing contest and throws his gloves into the ring to affirm this decision.

Example (9), 5.400 – 405

… *sic deinde locutus in medium geminos immani pondere caestus proiectit, quibus acer Eryx in proelia suetus ferre manum duroque intendere bracchia tergo. obstipuere animi: tantorum ingentia septem terga boum plumbo insuto ferroque *rigebant.*

… So he spoke and thereon threw into the ring a pair of gloves of giant weight, wherewith valiant Eryx was wont to enter contests, binding his arms with the tough hide. Amazed were the hearts of all, so vast were the seven huge oxhides, all stiff with insewn lead and iron.

The imperfect tense form *rigebant* is contemporaneous with the reference time indicated by *obstipuere*. Thus, the state of affairs *rigebant* does not advance reference time, but indicates why the crowd was amazed.

Imperfect tense forms expressing stationary situations are, for instance, found after direct speech (e.g. 3.717) or similes (example (10)). These imperfect tense forms indicate what the character was doing during and after his speech, or what he was doing in the reference time the narrator left before he started his simile, therewith taking the reader back to

144 The imperfect tense has other functions that may be seen as ‘backgrounding’, see §4.2.1 and §4.3.
the actual story after the ‘interruption’. In book 4, for instance, Mercury is flying to Aeneas in the reference time indicated by *misit*, when the narrator interrupts his story to compare him to a bird. After the simile, the reference time is taken up again by means of the imperfect tense forms *uolabat* and *secabat*.

Example (10), 4.252 – 258
hic primum paribus nitens Cyllenius alis constittit; hinc toto praeceps se corpore ad undas *misit* aui similis, quae circum litora, circum piscoscos scopolos humilis uolat aequora iuxta. haud aliter terras inter caelumque *uolabat* litus harenosum ad Libyae, uentosque *secabat* materno ueniens ab auo Cyllenia proles.

Here, poised on even wings, the Cyllenian first halted; hence with his whole frame he sped sheer down to the waves like a bird, which round the shores, round the fish-haunted cliff, flies low near to the waters. Even thus between earth and sky flew Cyllene’s nursling to Libya’s sandy shore, and cut the winds, coming from his mother’s sire.

The states of affairs *uolabat* and *secabat* are unbounded and take place in a reference time that has already been indicated by means of *misit*: they are stationary situations.

The few imperfect tense forms that do mark advancement of reference time can all be interpreted as doing this on account of pragmatic incompatibility (cf. §1.1.1.1 and §2.4.1): on the basis of knowledge of the world the state of affairs expressed by the imperfect tense cannot be interpreted as contemporaneous with the previous reference time. It would be rather illogical, for instance, to interpret the imperfect tense form *celebrabat* in (11) as contemporaneous with the reference time of *ait*, for it describes the action that Barce takes in response to Dido’s request.

Example (11), 4.632 – 6341
*tum breuiter Barcen nutricem adfata Sychaei, namque suam patria antiqua cinis ater habebat: 'Annam, cara mihi nutrix, huc siste sororem: dic corpus propter fluiali spargere lympha, et pecudes secum et monstrata piacula ducat. sic ueniat, tuque ipsa pia tege tempora uitta. sacra Ioui Stygio, quae rite incepta paraui, perficere est animus finemque imponere curis Dardanique rogum capitis permittere flammae. *sic ait. illa gradum studio *celebrabat* anili.*

Then briefly she addressed Barce, the nurse of Sychaeus, for the pyre’s black ashes held her own back in her country of long ago. “Dear nurse, bring my sister Anna here. Bid her hasten to sprinkle her body with river water and bring with her the evictims and offerings ordained for atonement. This done, let her come; and veil your brows, too, with a pure chaplet. I am minded to fulfil the rites of Stygian Jove that I have duly ordered and begun, to put an end to my woes, and gave over to the flames the pyre of that Dardan wretch.” She spoke; the nurse hastened her steps with an old woman’s zeal.

The imperfect tense form *celebrabat* marks progression of reference time in that the narrator seems to ‘jump’ from the reference time in which Dido was talking to that in which Barce was already well on her way. It is, therefore, the meaning of the sentence (and the previous sentence) in combination with *celebrabat* that advances reference time. The state of affairs *celebrabat* is, in accordance with the semantic value of the imperfect, interpreted as contemporaneous to this new reference time.

Within the narrative mode, the imperfect tense indicates that the state of affairs is contemporaneous with reference time (sometimes a new reference time). Since this usually leads to the interpretation that the state of affairs starts before reference time and continues afterwards, we may say that most imperfect tense forms in the narrative mode represent situations. However, four imperfect tense forms in the narrative mode are exceptional in that they are not unbounded, but take place within the boundaries provided by the context (see example (4)). An example is found at the very start of the actual story of the *Aeneid*.

---

145 The imperfect tense forms indicating progression of reference time such as *celebrabat* in (11) are found at 2.92; 2.279; 3.492; 4.238; 4.641; 7.502; 11.99
His accensa super, iactatos aequore toto Troas, reliquias Danaum atque immitis Achilli, arcabat longe Latio, multosque per annos errabant, acti fatis, maria omnia circum. 

Tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem.

Inflamed hereby yet more, she tossed on the wide main the Trojan remnant, left by the Greeks and pitiless Achilles, and kept them far from Latium; and many a year they wandered, driven by the fates o’er all the seas. So vast was the effort to found the Roman race.

In this example multos per annos is an indication of the duration of the state of affairs errabant, and, I would say, also of arcabat. As such, it provides a time span in the past of the narrator with which the states of affairs are contemporaneous, without evoking the interpretation that these states of affairs represent unbounded situations.

A different interpretation is called for in the case of tantae molis erat, the other imperfect tense form in example (12). This imperfect tense form is contemporaneous with the time span of multos per annos or another reference time, and holds for the story time of the Aeneid as a whole. As such, tantae molis erat is an instance of narrated information.

4.2.1 Narrated Information

The imperfect tense form tantae molis erat is an example of a specific group of imperfect tense forms within the narrative mode. Another example is habebat in namque suam patria antiqua cinis ater habebat (example (1) of this chapter). These imperfect tense forms represent states of affairs that are not only contemporaneous with reference time but seem to hold in the story world as a whole; they have a wider scope. These imperfect tense forms should be set aside from the narrative proper under the name of narrated information.

Narrated information is information that is presented in relation to the other states of affairs in the story. The explicit relation to other states of affairs is the aspect in which narrated information differs from information that is reported, since information that is reported is presented in relation to the time of narration (see §3.3).

Narrated information is often used to explain something in the story world. The information containing habebat (example (1)) explains, for instance, why Dido talks to the nurse of her husband. Narrated information is also used to contrast a state of affairs that is contemporaneous with reference time with a different state of affairs, e.g. a state of affairs in the time of narration. An example is the remark that ‘today Roman might has exalted [these rooftops] to heaven’, after which the narrator returns to the story world by means of tum and an imperfect tense form:

Example (13), 8.96 – 100

sol medium caeli conscenderat igneus orbem cum muros arcemque procul ac rara domorum tecta uident, quae nunc Romana potentia caelo aequauit, tum res inopes Euandrus habebat.

The fiery sun had scaled the mid arch of heaven, when at a distance they see the walls and a citadel, and scattered rooftops which today Roman might has exalted to heaven, but then Euander ruled, a scant domain.

---

146 The other imperfect tense forms filling a past time span (letifer annus) rather than exceeding a past orientation moment are found at 3.140: subito cum tabida membris/ corrupto caeli tractu miserandaque uenit/ arboribusque satisque lues et letifer annus./ linguebant dulcis animas aut aegra trahebant/ corpora (transl.: when on a sudden, from a tainted quarter of the sky, came a pestilence and season of death, to the wasting of our bodies and the piteous ruin of trees and crops. Men gave up their sweet lives, or dragged enfeebled frames.)

147 The same technique of comparing a nunc with a tum, or rather a state of affairs in the imperfect tense before nunc, may be used if the adverb nunc refers to reference time, i.e. if reference time is the base (e.g. 5.526). It is also used in character speech, e.g. 1.239 or 1.395.

148 Comparable instances are: 9.388, 12.135, 12.33.
The first part of this example is presented in the directing mode, and then the narrator switches to the report mode to state something about the Rome of his own time (printed bold). The adverb *tum* indicates another change of discourse mode, but the base is still the time of narration: the narrator uses narrated information to compare the Rome of his own time to the Rome of Euander. The imperfect tense form *habebat* represents a state of affairs that is contemporaneous with the reference time (the orientation moment in the past of base), and the content of the clause suggests that this state of affairs is generally valid in this story world of the past.

4.2.2 Conclusion
In this section I have discussed the interpretation of imperfect tense forms in the narrative mode and a subtype of narrative, narrated information. From the above we may conclude that imperfect tense forms function in the same way in both the narrative mode and narrated information: they usually represent unbounded situations contemporaneous with reference time. In sum, 121 imperfect tense forms (indicative) occur in the narrative proper and 62 imperfect tense forms give narrated information.

Narrated information can be seen as a form of ‘background’, and is therefore one of the environments in which the imperfect functions as a background tense. As was shown in table 1 above (this chapter), the imperfect tense is used as a background tense in the narrative proper as well.

The examples (12) – (13) (narrated information) touch upon an important difference between the imperfect and the perfect tense in a specific group of states of affairs in stories. This group consists of states of affairs that concern the general characteristics of a story world (the existence of a certain building in the story world, for instance). Section 4.10.4 discusses this group of states of affairs in more detail. The choice between the perfect and the imperfect tense in the case of these particular states of affairs corresponds with a choice for the report or narrative mode respectively. This does not mean, however, that the imperfect tense does not occur in the report mode, as I will explain in §4.4.

4.3 Description Mode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base</th>
<th>Time of narration</th>
<th>Reference time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Report</td>
<td>Transposed Report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registering</td>
<td>Directing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Transposed Narrative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Transposed Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The previous chapters on the present and perfect tense only consider the *transposed* description mode which has a base in reference time (§2.7, §3.6), but, of course, a description mode taking a base in the time of narration also exists.

The description mode is characterized by a lack of temporal progression and the idea of spatial progression over an object or through a scene that existed in the past of the base (Smith 2003). All states of affairs in a sequence in the description mode are situations: they are unbounded in reference time. The imperfect tense denotes that a state of affairs is contemporaneous with a time in the past, for instance with reference time, and it is usually interpreted as an unbounded state of affairs. Hence, the imperfect tense can be regarded as the tense that is characteristic of the description mode.

The imperfect tense forms *cingebant* and *erat* in (14) denote situations that are contemporaneous with reference time: the narrator takes the time of narration as a base while describing the features of a location that existed in a past time.
In example (14), reference time does not advance as the characteristics of a field are described.

We also find the description mode in ekphrasis, as is illustrated by the example below. Reference time does not move in this example, whereas the spatial movement along the shield is indicated by means of *haud procul inde*.149

Example (15), 8.642 – 645

Not far from there, four-horse chariots, driven apart had torn Mettus asunder (but you, Alban, should have stood by your words!), and Tullus dragged the liar’s body through the woods, and the brambles dripped with dew of blood.

As I showed in §2.7, an ekphrasis often contains transposed descriptions (present tense), but the narrator chooses to present this particular part of the shield by taking a base in the time of narration. The imperfect tense is used 69 times in the description mode with a base in the time of narration, 25 of which occur in ekphrasis.151

The imperfect tense is, as said, seen as the ‘background’ tense of the Latin tense system, and there is, of course, a connection between the use of the imperfect tense in the description mode and its classification as a background tense. The description mode is indeed in several instances used to provide the background, the décor, of the story (e.g. example (14). However, I would prefer not to call the description mode a background mode, as I will explain in §8.4.

### 4.4 Report Mode

In the report mode, the states of affairs are presented in their direct relation with the moment of narration. The imperfect tense presents a state of affairs in relation with a time of the past. This might lead to the assumption that the imperfect tense is not found in the report mode. It is, however, used 25 times in the report mode. An example is *colebat* in (16), in which an altar of which Dido used to take care is introduced by means of the report mode.

---

149 Of course, we may assume some movement of reference time between line 625 (start of shield description) and 729 (end of shield description), yet this time is irrelevant as long as the shield is described (see §8.4). See chapter 5 for the pluperfect tense *distulerant* which indicates that this state of affairs has taken place before the moment of depiction (i.e. analepsis within ekphrasis).

150 For the pluperfect tense form *distulerant*, see §5.5.

151 All instances of the imperfect in the describing parts of ekphrasis and taking a base in reference time are found in the shield description (see below for the use of the imperfect in thet description of Juno’s temple murals). The other descriptions containing imperfect tenses are found at 2.517; 5.288; 7.181; 7.187; 8.233; 8.603; 9.004; 9.383; 9.581.
Example (16), 4.457 – 459
praeterea fuit in tectis de marmore templum conuigis antiqui, miro quod honore colebat, uelleribus niueis et festa fronde reunctum:

Moreover, there was in the palace a marble chapel to her former lord, which she cherished in wondrous honour, wreathing it with snowy fleeces and festal foliage:

The state of affairs colebat is contemporaneous with the period in time in which this altar existed. This time is presented in the report mode, by means of the perfect tense form fuit. Thus, the perfect tense form fuit provides the past orientation moment with which the imperfect tense form is contemporaneous (see example (4)).

As a matter of fact, in all cases of the imperfect tense in the report mode the orientation moment is presented in a direct relation to the moment of narration and explicitly indicated. The relation with the time of narration is in these cases, therefore, not indicated by means of the tense form (the imperfect), but by means of the orientation moment of this tense form.

This use of the imperfect is also found in direct speech, for example in book 9, when Berecynthia speaks to Jupiter. The imperfect tense form sacra ferebant is contemporaneous with the state of affairs lucus in arce fuit.152

Example (17), 9.85 – 87
pinea silua mihi multos dilecta per annos, lucus in arce fuit summa, quo sacra ferebant, nigranti picea trabisque obscurus acernis.

A grove I had upon the mountain’s crest, where men brought me offerings – a pine forest beloved for many years, dim with dusky firs and trunks of maple.

The imperfect tense may also be used in similes. In book 2, the Greek Pyrrhus and, especially, his shining armour are compared to the glistening of a snake that has cast off his old skin and first comes into the light again after the winter.

Example (18), 2.471 – 475
qualis ubi in lucem coluber mala gramina pastus, frigida sub terra tumidum quem bruma tegebat, nunc, positis nouis exuuiis nitidusque iuuenta, lubrica conuoluit sublato pectore terga arduus ad solem, et linguis micat ore trisulcis.

Even as when into the light comes a snake, fed on poisonous herbs, whom cold winter kept swollen underground, now, his slough cast off, fresh and glistening in youth, with uplifted breast he rolls his slippery length, towering towards the sun and darting from his mouth a three-forked tongue.

The clause containing tegebat describes how the snake was hibernating before ‘nunc’. That is, the imperfect tense forms tegebat is contemporaneous with the orientation moment that is made explicit by means of the substantive bruma.153 This orientation moment is in the past of the ‘nunc’ of the simile.

4.5 Transposed Report Mode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base</th>
<th>Time of narration</th>
<th>Reference time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Report</td>
<td>Transposed Report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registering</td>
<td>Directing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Transposed Narrative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Transposed Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The difference between report and transposed report is a difference in base. Whereas in the report mode the base is positioned in the time of narration, it is positioned in reference time in transposed report. The interpretation of the imperfect tense is, of course, the same as in the

152 This example also illustrates that an imperfect tense form denotes a state of affairs that is contemporaneous with a time (orientation moment) in the past, rather than that it indicates imperfective aspect. The state of affairs ferebant does not exceed beyond its past orientation moment (see example (4)).

153 This is the only example of the imperfect indicative in a simile. The adverb nunc occurs in four similes (4.443; 11.624; 12.474).
report mode: the imperfect tense indicates a state of affairs that is contemporaneous with an
orientation moment in the past of base, and this orientation moment is explicitly indicated. A
possible indication of an orientation moment in the past of reference time is for instance *olum* (e.g. 5.256), or *modo*, as in the example below.154

Example (19), 11.139 – 143
Et iam Fama uolans, tanti praenuntia luctus,
Euandrum Euandrique domos et moenia replet,
*quae modo* victorem Latino Pallanta *ferebat*.
Arcades ad portas ruere et de more uetusto
funerea rapuere faces; lucet uia longo
ordine flammarum et late discriminat agros.

And now Rumour in her flight, heralding this piercing
woe, fills Evanders’ ears, his palace and his city-
Rumour that but now was proclaiming the triumph of
Pallas to the dwellers in Latium. The Arcadians hurry
to the gates, having after ancient custom snatched up
toches for the funeral.

This *analepsis* to a happier time before reference time emphasizes the contrast between the
time before reference time in which Fama regularly brought news about Pallas’ victories
(*modo*) and reference time itself in which Fama brings the message of Pallas’ untimely death.

Apart from taking place in the past of reference time, *ferebat* also, automatically, took
place in the past of the time of narration. Therefore, this relative clause might also be seen as
‘normal’ report. It seems to make more sense, however, to leave the time of narration out of
consideration and to concentrate on the relation between the reference time of *replet* and the
orientation moment evoked by *modo*: *modo* is an orientation moment in the past of the
reference time of *replet*. Whereas in the report mode the imperfect tense form functions to
indicate a state of affairs that is contemporaneous with an orientation moment in the past of
the *time of narration*, in transposed report this orientation moment is specifically in the past of
*reference time*.

The difference between the imperfect tense and the perfect tense in transposed report
is the same as in the report mode: the imperfect tense presents a state of affairs as
contemporaneous with an explicit past orientation moment, whereas the perfect tense merely
present the state of affairs as anterior to reference time. This may be illustrated by means of
the example below, in which the imperfect tense emphasizes that the Trojans look back at the
times of fighting, since this tense refers to the past orientation moment of the (now finished)
times of battle.

Example (20), 2.26 - 30
*ergo omnis longo soluit se Teucria luctu;*
panduntur portae, iuuat ire et Dorica castra
desertosque uidere locum litusque relictum:
hic Dolopum manus, hic saeuus *tendebat* Achilles;
classibus hic locus, hic acie certare *solebant*.

*So all the Teucrian land frees itself from its long
sorrow. The gates are opened; it is a joy to go and see
the Doric camp, the deserted stations and forsaken
shore. Here the Dolopian bands encamped, here cruel
Achilles; here lay the fleet; here they used to meet us
in battle.*

The states of affairs *tendebat* and *solebant* are contemporaneous with an orientation moment
in the *past of reference time*, to wit the time that the Greeks had not yet left the Trojan coast.
Perfect tense forms would not have evoked the idea of the Trojans thinking back to a time in
their past, but would have emphasized that these states of affairs were finished in reference
time. The imperfect tense evokes the idea that the Trojans are thinking back to this time in the
past. Apparently, the imperfect tense in the transposed report mode is a device to present
embedded focalization (in terms of Bal 1985 and De Jong 1987).

154 Sometimes, the orientation moment must be derived from the context, see example (20) and (21). Cf. also
10.859 in which the imperfect tense forms refer to a time in which Mezentius was healthy and could ride his
horse.
Example (20) also shows that the orientation moment is in certain cases evoked by the context. Another example that illustrates this is found in book 6, when the Sybille shows Charon the golden bough in order to convince him to take her and Aeneas on his boat. She shows the bough in the middle of her speech, having kept it hidden under her clothes until that moment. The imperfect *latebat* indicates that she had kept it there during the preceding time, from the moment that Aeneas gave it to her (this happens in 6.211).\(^{155}\)

Example (21), 6.405-408

si te nulla mouet tantae pietatis imago,
at ramum hunc' (aperit ramum qui ueste *latebat*)
‘agnoscas.’ tumida ex ira tum corda residunt;
nec plura his.

If the picture of such piety in no wise moves you, yet know this bough’—and she shows the bough, hidden in her robe. At this his swelling breast subsides from its anger.

Since the state of affairs *latebat* is incompatible with *aperit*, the reader should interpret the state of affairs *latebat* as lying completely in the past of the reference time of *aperit*.\(^{156}\) The state of affairs *latebat* is contemporaneous with a time span that lies in the past of reference time: the time that the Sybille has had the bough in her possession. This time span is not made explicit in the context, but arises from the contrast between *aperire* and *laterere*.

The examples in this section show that the imperfect tense may take its base in reference time, indicating a state of affairs that is contemporaneous with an orientation moment in the past of reference time. Transposed report contains imperfect tense forms expressing states of affairs that took place completely in the past of reference time. The imperfect tense also occurs in the directing mode. In this mode, imperfect tense forms indicate that the state of affairs takes place in the immediate past of reference time, and (possibly) continue in reference time.

### 4.6 The Imperfect Tense and the Directing Mode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse Mode</th>
<th>Base</th>
<th>Time of narration</th>
<th>Reference time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Report</td>
<td>Report</td>
<td>Transposed Report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registering</td>
<td>Directing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Transposed Narrative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Transposed Description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The directing mode is characterized by a simultaneous advancement of reference time, base and narrator. The narrator relates what he pretends to experience in the current reference time (i.e. ‘live on stage’), or what has just occurred in reference time (§3.4). At all times, the narrator is in charge of his story: the story may seem to unfold before his eyes, time and again the narrator shows that he is, in fact, the director of this story.

The semantic value of the imperfect tense is to indicate that a state of affairs is contemporaneous with an orientation moment in the past of base. In the directing mode, the base is reference time. So, an imperfect tense in the directing mode would indicate that a state of affairs is contemporaneous with an orientation moment in the past of reference time. This orientation moment is positioned in the recent past of reference time, due to the fact that the directing mode is an account of what is going on in the subsequent reference times of the story. Thus, the imperfect tense in the directing mode indicates that a state of affairs is contemporaneous with an orientation moment positioned in the immediate past of reference time.

\(^{155}\) Other examples are for instance: 1.113, 1.188, 5.674, 12.705.

\(^{156}\) In relative clauses such as these, an alternative analysis might be to assume a shift in discourse mode to narrated information. I would like to distinguish, however, between states of affairs that are clearly positioned in the past of reference time (transposed report) and those states of affairs which are situations in reference time (narrated information), see also §4.6.2 below. One could even argue that in narrated information from a base in the time of narration the pluperfect tense form *latuerat* would have been used to indicate that this state of affairs anterior to reference time (see §5.6).
In section 4.6.1, I will argue that this interpretation has to be put on several imperfect tense forms that occur within a directed sequence, on the basis of the context. These imperfect tense forms take place in the past of reference time, but are not necessarily finished in reference time.

However, not all imperfect tense forms occurring in directed sequences should be interpreted in the way proposed above. In section 4.6.2, I will discuss imperfect tense forms the base of which cannot be unequivocally identified: since they occur within a sequence of present tense forms, a base in reference time might be defensible, but a brief excursion to a base in the time of narration seems more likely in these cases.

4.6.1 Actions already started
Examples of imperfect tense forms within a directed sequence are *ibant* and *petebant* in example (22). Aeneas and Achates are hidden in a cloud and see their Trojan comrades approach a temple, the imperfect tense forms *ibant* and *petebant*. The imperfect tense indicates that the Trojans had already been approaching the temple for some time.

Example (22), 1.516 – 519
Dissimulant, et nube cava speculantur amicti, quae fortuna viris, classem quo litore linquant, quid veniant; cunctis nam lecti navibus *ibant*, orantes veniam, et templum clamore *petebant*.

The imperfect tense indicates that the Trojans had been advancing from the ships and had been approaching the temple before the reference time of *speculantur* (line 516). The particle *nam* explicates that these states of affairs have an explanatory function.157 Thereby, it facilitates our interpretation of *ibant* and *petebant*. I will come back to the explanatory function of these imperfect tense forms below (example (27) – (29).

The imperfect tense forms in example (22) illustrate that in the directing mode the imperfect functions in accordance with its semantic value: the states of affairs are contemporaneous with an orientation moment that is in the past of reference time (the moment before Aeneas and Achates see their comrades). The situations indicated by the imperfect tense continue in reference time, but the narrator uses the imperfect tense to emphasize that the states of affairs were going on before ‘now’.

The imperfect tense is used quite often in the directing mode: 179 imperfect tense forms indicate that the state of affairs took place in the past of reference time. As is the case in example (22), where *ibant* and *petebant* appear in the text after *speculantur*, most of these 179 imperfect tense forms appear after the present tense form that indicates the reference time. Since these imperfect tense forms are ‘added’ to an existing reference time, they, by definition, do not advance reference time, but are to be taken as stationary states of affairs. As is shown in table 2, the imperfect is also used for frames and advancing states of affairs in the directing mode.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Advancing</th>
<th>Stationary</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advancing</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stationary</td>
<td>106</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>179</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

157 See Kroon (1995) for a description of the uses of *nam*. It has to be said here that *nam* is a particle that typically occurs in the narrated information of the Aeneid.
An example of a frame is *rubescabit* in (22). A frame introduces a new reference time in order to locate another state of affairs in time or place. The imperfect tense forms *rubescabit* introduces a new reference time, at the start of a new scene, in order to locate the state of affairs *uidemus* in time: *iamque rubescabit* indicates that the sky had been turning red for some time when the Trojans saw Italy from their ship.

Example (23), 3.521 – 524

*iamque rubescabit* stellis Aurora fugatis
*cum procul obscuros collis humilemque uidemus*
*Italiam. Italian primus conclamat Achates,*
*Italian laeto socii clamore saluant*

And now the stars were put to rout and Dawn was blushing, when far off we see dim hills and low-lying Italy. ‘Italy!’ cries Achates the foremost; Italy my comrades hail with joyful cry.

This example illustrates that the imperfect tense advances reference time in the directing mode in a way similar to advancing imperfect tense forms in the narrative mode (example (11)): the narrator seems to ‘jump’ from one reference time into the next. In this next reference time a situation, *rubescabit*, had already started, a fact that is made explicit here by means of the particle *iam*. This sequence of imperfect and present tense may be explained as follows: the narrator starts this scene taking a base in the reference time of *uidemus*, but does not mention that event yet. Instead, he tells about a situation that happened in the past of this yet unmentioned event. Thereby, emphasis is given to *uidemus*.

Apart from that, the sequence of imperfect and present creates an effect that is comparable to a *fade in* in a movie: the scene starts with a wide view of a red sky and then the ‘camera’ focuses on the Trojans, who spot Italy. However, by using the combination of the imperfect tense and *iam*, the narrator provides his readers with more information than a camera may ever give: he tells us that this state of affairs was already taking place before he told us about it (before the camera started filming it). That is, the process of the sky turning red started before the reference time of *uidemus*.

The few imperfect tense forms that advance reference time do so in the same way as *rubescabit*: the narrator advances to a reference time before which a state of affairs had been going on. An example is found in book 2, when Aeneas describes how he puts on his armor, after he has decided to continue defending Troy. Reference time advances with *ecce autem haerabet* in this example. The interpretation of the imperfect tense forms *haerabet* and *tendebat* is supported because of the particle *ecce* (in combination with *autem*): *ecce* indicates advancement of reference time, while the imperfect conveys that the state of affairs had been going on already. The combination suggests that the narrator draws our attention to what was going on in another part of the stage while he was telling something else (also e.g. 9.417, cf. Mellet 1988:186f.).

Example (24), 2.671 – 680

*Hinc ferro accingor rursus clipeoque sinistram insertabam aptans meque extra tecta ferebam. ecce autem complexa pedes in limine coniunx haerabet, parumque patri tendebat Iulum:* 
‘si periturus abis, et nos rape in omnia tecum; sin aliquam expertus sumptis spem ponis in armis, hanc primum tutare domum. cui paruus Iulus, cui pater et coniunx quondam tua dicta relinquor?’
*Talia uociferans gemitu tectum omne replebat,*
cum subj itum dictuque *oritur* mirabile monstrum.

*Once more I strap on my sword, pass my left arm into the shield, as I fit it on, and was hurrying forth from the house, when lo! on the threshold my wife clung to me, clasping my feet and holding up little Iulus to his father. ‘If you go to die, take us, too, with you for any fate. But if from past experience, you place some hope in the armor you have donned, guard first this house. To whom you abandon little Iulus, your father, and me, once called your wife?’ So crying, she filled all the house with moaning; when a sudden portent appears, wondrous to tell.*

---

158 The adverb *interea* and the particle *ecce* function in a similar way.
This example shows that a series of imperfect tense forms in the directing mode may conjure up a very pictorial effect (Kroon & Rose 1996). As the narrator switches from one state of affairs in full course to another, he, as it were, gives us a series of snap shots instead of a fluent narrative. The first state of affairs of example (24) is presented by a present tense form and indicates an event in reference time: Aeneas straps on his sword. He is doing several things at once, however, and after accingor he is already busy passing his left arm into his shield (insertabam). The first snap shot consisting of insertabam and ferebam shows how Aeneas is standing on the threshold, putting on his armor.

The second snap shot is taken a few seconds later. That is, reference time advances with ecce haerebat, and the narrator informs us that in this new reference time Creusa has taken Aeneas’ knees, and has been sitting on the threshold and stretching out Ascanius to Aeneas for a while already. Then Creusa starts to talk and the reference time advances again, and during Creusa’s speech the miracle in line 680 (oritur mirabile monstrum) occurs.

The above examples show that in the directing mode the imperfect is used to indicate that a state of affairs took place in the past of reference time, whether this reference time is new (advancing states of affairs), introduces another state of affairs (frames), or added to an already mentioned reference time (stationary situations). As I said, the imperfect tense is used most in the directing mode to indicate stationary situations.

The function of this use of the imperfect in stationary situations deserves further attention. These imperfect tense forms are mainly used to introduce a state of affairs into the story that had been going on before, but that was not relevant up until now. An example is found in book 9, when Ascanius kills Remulus. It is only after a full description of this first act of war by Ascanius and the Trojan’s reaction to it, that the narrator provides his reader with the information that Apollo happened to be watching all of this: forte uidebat.

Example (25), 9.632 – 640
effugit horrendum stridens adducta sagitta
perque caput Remuli unuit et cauæ temporæ ferro
traicit. ‘i, uerbis uirtutem inlude superbis!
bis capti Phryges haec Rutulis responsa remittunt’:
hoc tantum Ascanius. Teucr claremo sequuntur
laetitiaque fremunt animosque ad sidera
tollunt. Aetheria tum forte plaga crinitalis Apollo
desuper Ausoniae acies urbemque uidebat
nube sedens, atque his uictorem adfatur Iulum:

With awful whirr speeds forth the tight-drawn shaft, passes through the head of Remulus, and cleaves the hollow temples with its steel: “Go, mock valour with haughty words! This is the answer that the twice captured Phrygians send back to the Rutulians.” Ascanius said no more. The Teucrians second him with cheers, they shout for joy, and raise their spirits to the skies. Then it chanced that in the realm of sky long-haired Apollo, could-enthroned, was looking down on the Ausonian lines and town, and thus he addresses triumphant Iulus.

The adverb tum indicates the moment after tollunt and is an indication of the reference time of adfatur. The state of affairs uidebat took place mostly in the past of this moment, and is contemporaneous with all actions of Ascanius during his attack and killing of Remulus. Because of the combination of the imperfect tense with forte it is clear that the state of affairs in the imperfect tense is simultaneous to the states of affairs in the preceding scene: uidebat presents what Apollo was doing while the narrator was talking about Ascanius. 159

As a matter of fact, the imperfect tense is used quite often when we move from one part of the stage to another. A clear example of this is in my opinion found at the end of book 1, where Iopas has just sung his song and the Carthaginians and the Trojans are applauding. Then the narrator shifts his attention to what Dido has been doing all this time:

159 Similarly to the particle nam, the adverb forte is also used in narrated information.
With shout on shout the Tyrians applaud, and the Trojans follow. No less did unhappy Dido prolong the night with varied talk and drank deep draughts of love, asking much of Priam, of Hector much; now of the armor in which came the son of Dawn; now of the wondrous steeds of Diomedes; …

Quinn (1968:87) rightly observes that “we underestimate the artistry of Virgil’s conclusion if we suppose that Dido does not begin to ask her questions till Iopas has finished his song - right at the end of the book. The imperfects unobtrusively imply a quite different situation: Dido has been talking to Aeneas throughout the banquet - and falling more and more in love with him; the narrator has not missed what has been going on, but hitherto there have been more important things to describe.” The imperfect tense is used to describe a situation that was taking place in the past of reference time, possibly continuing in reference time. The shift in attention of the banquet hall as a whole to Dido in particular evokes the interpretation that the situations had started earlier than the current reference time.

The use of the imperfect tense to indicate what is going on in another part of the stage is recognized by several commentators of the Aeneid, especially when it is used to give the reaction of a character to whom another character is speaking. The imperfect tense indicates that this reaction has been taking place during the speech of the other character, as Gransden, for instance, points out in his commentary on Aeneid 8.153, stating that Euander (ille) had been watching Aeneas when the latter was speaking.

The imperfect tense form lustrabat denotes a state of affairs that took place in the past of the current reference time which is specified by means of the present tense form refert. The state of affairs lustrabat takes place in the past of reference time as iamdudum explicatates: lustrabat takes place during the speech and the time directly after the speech, and possibly continues in reference time.

In example (27), the imperfect lustrabat indicates what Euander was doing while Aeneas was speaking, but the imperfect is, of course, also suitable to inform us about the actions of the speaking character, as is illustrated in the example below. This excerpt gives an account of the last moments of Euryalus’ life: he is captured by Volcens while Nisus is watching the scene from his hiding place.

Volcens storms with rage, but nowhere espies the sender of the dart, nor where to vent his rage. “Yet you, meanwhile, with your hot blood, will pay me vengeance for both,” he cried and, as he spoke, rushed with drawn sword on Euryalus. Then indeed, frantic with terror, Nisus shouts aloud; no longer could he hide himself in darkness or endure such agony: …

---

160 See also Conington on 5.852 and 8.584, Quinn on 9.250 (1968:95) and 12.55 (1968:86).

161 See chapter 5 for the use of the pluperfect tense form dixerat.
We should picture Volcens as speaking and rushing with his sword on Euryalus simultaneously, as simul indicates. As such, the state of affairs ibat is contemporaneous with an orientation moment in the past of reference time. This time span is formed by the short speech of Volcens, while the reference time after the speech is made explicit by the present tense form conclamat.

In §4.2 on the narrative mode, I explained that the imperfect tense, as part of the narrative mode, may be used after direct speech and similes to mark the return to the story world. In the present section, I argue that imperfect tense forms may be used after direct speech to indicate what was going on during this speech, and this, of course, raises the question how both uses can be distinguished. The directing mode is to be assumed only in those cases in which a state of affairs indeed may be or even should be interpreted as simultaneous to the speaking.

The cases of imperfect tense forms occurring after similes are somewhat more difficult. They may be seen as indicating a situation that is going on in reference time, as is the case in example (10) above. Example (29), however, leaves room for an interpretation similar to that of the imperfect tense forms ibat in example (28) and lustrabat in (27). The verb form ibat in example (29) below may indicate that the state of affairs was going on in the period before the reference time.

Example (29), 4.141 – 150

… ipse ante alios pulcherrimus omnis
infert se socium Aeneas atque agmina iungit.
qualis ubi hibernam Lyciam Xanthique fluenta
deserit ac Delum maternam inuisset Apollo
instauratque choris, mixtique altarum circum
Cretæque Dryopesque fremunt pictique Agathyrsi;
ipse iugis Cynthi graditur mollique fluentem
fronde premit crimem fingens atque implicat auro,
tela sonant umeris: haud illo segnior ibat
Aeneas, tantum egregio decus enitet ore.

Aeneas himself, goodly beyond all others, advances to join her and unites his band with hers. As when Apollo quits Lycia, his winter home, and the streams of Xanthus, to visit his mother’s Delos, and renews the dance, while mingling about his altars Cretans and Dryopes and painted Agathyrsians raise their voices – he himself treads the Cynthian riges, and with soft foliage shapes and binds his flowing locks, braiding it with golden diadem; the shafts rattle on his shoulders: so no less lightly than he went Aeneas, such beauty shines forth from his noble face!

The state of affairs ibat partly took place in the past of the reference time after the simile, and, thus, had been going on already before the reference time of the present tense form enitet. But alternatively, we may also assume a shift in discourse mode between ibat en enitet: a shift from the narrative mode (used to mark the return to story world, see §8.3) to the directing mode.

I have argued in this section that there is a group of imperfect tense forms that indicate states of affairs that took place in the past of reference time, continuing in reference time. In some cases this interpretation is undisputed, but the last examples illustrated that in other cases we cannot be certain about the base, and that a change in base and discourse mode might have to be assumed. A group of imperfect tense forms in which such an interruption in discourse mode seems even more likely will be discussed in the next section.
4.6.2 Interruptions within the Directing Mode

Some sequences presented in the directing mode are briefly interrupted by an imperfect tense form that does not take a base in reference time. That is, these imperfect tense forms do not take place in the past of reference time, as the imperfect tense forms in examples (22) – (29) do. An example of such an imperfect tense is found when Aeneas interrupts his account of the welcoming of the Trojan horse into the city to make a remark from his own point in time.

Example (30), 2.31 – 39

Some are amazed at maiden Minerva’s gift of death, and marvel at the massive horse: and first Thymoetes urges that it be drawn within our walls and lodged in the citadel; either it was treachery or the doom of Troy was already tending that way. But Capys, and they whose minds were wiser in counsel, bid us either hurl headlong into the sea this guile of the Greeks, this distrusted gift, or fire it with flames heaped beneath; or else pierce and probe the hollow hiding place of the belly.

The present tense forms *stupet*, *mirantur* and *hortatur* describe what is happening in reference time, and then, with *siue*, the narrator steps out of this sequence to look back on the situation of *ferebant* from his own point in time. The narrator shows his uncertainty about the facts and this is probably why he stops using the directing mode.\(^\text{162}\) The narrator looks back to narrate what in his opinion might have been going on. Narrated information is inserted in a directed sequence to add an evaluative flavor.

The example below shows that such an evaluative flavor is not a necessary feature of narrated information embedded in a directed sequence. Drances’ reaction to Turnus’ speech in book 11 is directed (*surgit*, *onerat* and *aggerat*), but first the necessary information on this character is given by means of narrated information (*agitabat*, *dabat* and *ferebat*).

Example (31), 11.336 – 342

Then Drances, hostile as before, whom the renown of Turnus goaded with the bitter stings of furtive envy, lavish of wealth and valiant of tongue, though his hand was cold in battle, in counsel deemed no mean adviser, in faction strong (his mother’s high birth ennobled his lineage; from his father he drew obscure rank), rises and with these words loads and heaps high their wrath:

Apart from interruptions that provide narrated information, we also find the description mode interrupting a sequence in the directing mode, as may be observed from example (32). The excerpt is part of Achaemenides’ story of how the Greeks defeated Polyphemus. This story is presented in the directing mode. The clause considering the features of Polyphemus’ eye (*quod … latebat*) is, however, presented as a past state of affairs in the description mode, that is, past with respect to the time of narration.

---

\(^{162}\) The directing mode is never used when the narrator is uncertain about the events in his story world, see §8.2.2.
Thus, the imperfect tense form indicates a brief excursion into the description mode.

The table below shows the quantity of imperfect tense forms that interrupt directed sequences in both the narrative and description mode.

Table 3: Non-directed imperfect tense forms within directed sequences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrated information</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of 17 of these verb forms occur in relative clauses. Apparently, the use of a relative clause together with the imperfect tense is a typical device for setting a state of affairs apart from the directed actions in its immediate environment. The other clauses with imperfect tense forms are also sed ‘aside’ from the main text, by means of the particle nam, for instance.

4.7 Transposed Description Mode

In chapter 2 and 3, I discussed the transposed description mode. Situations in the transposed description mode are represented by means of present tense forms or, less often, by means of perfect tense forms denoting events that are anterior to reference time and that have resulted in situations in reference time. In addition to the present and perfect tense, the imperfect tense occurs in the transposed description mode as well. Within a transposed description the imperfect indicates a situation that was already going on before reference time (i.e. in an orientation moment in the past of reference time). This is illustrated in the example below, in which the particle iam creates the idea of a past orientation moment for the state of affairs adseruabant.

Example (33), 2.760 – 767

procedo et Priami sedes arcemque reuiso: et iam porticibus uacuis Junonis asylo custodes lecti Phoenix et dirus Vlixes praedam adseruabant. huc undique Troia gaza incensis erepta adytis, mensaeque deorum crateresque auro solidi, captuiaque uestis congeritur. pueri et pauidae longo ordine matres stant circum.

I pass on and see once more the citadel and Priam’s home. And now in the empty courts of Juno’s sanctuary Phoenix and dread Ulysses, chosen guards, watched the spoil. Here the treasures from all parts of Troy, torn from blazing shrines, tables of the gods, bowls of solid gold, and plundered raiment, are heaped up; boys and trembling matrons in long array stand round…

163 All imperfect tense forms of table 3 are included in the amount of imperfect tense forms in the narrative mode and narrated information (§4.2) and in the description mode (§4.3).
The particle *iam*, together with the content of this sequence evokes the idea that the imperfect tense form *adservabant* refers to the past of reference time: while Aeneas was fleeing with his wife and child, Phoenix and Odysseus had taken over Juno’s sanctuary in Priam’s palace and had already been guarding it for a while when Aeneas returns (*reuiso*). In the reference time of *reuiso*, Aeneas sees them watching their spoil and infers that they had been doing this for some time already. He also sees all Trojan treasures being heaped up and the Trojan women and children standing around it. Thus, *adservabant*, *congeritur* and *stant* are part of the transposed description mode. The use of the imperfect tense form *adservabant* seems to emphasize the defeat of the Trojans: only hours before this was the site of fights and killings and now it has already been taken over by the Greeks *for a while*.

This example shows that the use of the imperfect tense in transposed description is a suitable technique for embedded focalization (in terms of Bal 1985 and De Jong 1987): first the narrator describes the actions of the character who is looking at, or entering (e.g. 8.423, see also example (20)), a part of the story world, and then he tells his readers by means of imperfect tense forms what was already going on in this part of the story world when the gaze of the focalizer fell on it.

Usually, transposed descriptions contain several states of affairs, but the example below contains a description consisting of only one state of affairs in the imperfect tense.164 The imperfect tense form *ibat* indicates that the narrator has shifted from the reference time of *sequitur* to a reference time in which Aeneas had already been walking towards the mound for quite some time. The adverb *hic* at the start of the next passage explicitly indicates that Aeneas has now arrived.

Example (34), 5.72 – 78

*Sic fatus uelat materna tempora myrto.*

hoc Helymus facit, hoc aeu maturus Acestes,
hoc puer Ascanius, sequitur quos cetera pubes.
ille e concilio multis cum milibus *ibat*

*a tumulum magna mediun comitante caterua.*

hic duo rite mero libans *carchesia Baccho*  

fundit humi, duo lacte nouo, duo sanguine sacro,

purpureosque iacit flores ac talia fatur:

So speaking, he crowns his brows with his mothers myrtle. Thus does Helymus, thus Acestes, ripe of years, thus the boy Ascanius, the rest of the youth following. Then from the assembly to the mound he passed, amid many thousands, the center of the great attending throng. Here in due libation he pours on the ground two goblets of unmixed wine, two of fresh milk, two of the blood of victims, and showering bright blossoms, thus he cries:

In this example, the narrator presents a short snapshot of Aeneas who has been walking and is walking towards a tomb, accompanied by many men.

This imperfect tense form *ibat* is one of the imperfect tense forms which commentaries call ingressive (Williams 1960 ad l.) or inceptive, an explanation similar to the ‘instantaneous perfect’ (see §3.4.2).165 This term ‘ingressive imperfect’ is misleading, and I emphasize here that the imperfect tense *never* indicates the start of a state of affairs, but only indicates that the narrator focuses on the part of the state of affairs before reference time. So, instead of denoting the start of a state of affairs, the imperfect tense may indicate, in the directing mode, that a state of affairs *has already started*.166

---

164 A similar example is, for instance, *ibant* in 6.268. Cf. also 8.307ff and 8.463ff.
165 For instance: Conington on 2.382, Mackail on 7.39, Austin on 1.360; 2.254, Williams on 3.34; 5.98, Horsfall on 7.502; 11.4.
166 Palmer (1977:307) gives a clear explanation of how the English speaking commentators came to this interpretation: “These [the conative and ingressive interpretation, SA] are prompted by the difficulties of translation into languages which lack, or have developed differently, the grammatical categories of aspect. Thus *tunc dentes mihi cadebant primulum* [P.Men. 1116] means properly ‘there I was with my teeth falling out’ (‘eyewitness’ aspect). English translates ‘my teeth began to fall out’ and the grammars catalogue the use as ‘ingressive’.”
The imperfect tense is used in the transposed description mode to refer to states of affairs which are contemporaneous with the immediate past of reference time, while continuing in reference time. This interpretation is in line with the semantic value of the imperfect tense: these states of affairs are contemporaneous with an orientation moment in the past of base. The base is reference time, and the immediate past of reference time is the past orientation moment. This interpretation should, in my opinion, be given to 52 imperfect tense forms.

4.8. The Imperfect Subjunctive for counterfactuals

Subject of this section are the imperfect subjunctives that describe a counterfactual situation (irrealis). The imperfect subjunctive describes counterfactual situations in the present, or the base. I argue that, like the imperfect indicative, the imperfect subjunctive can take a base in both the time of narration and reference time. That is, the imperfect subjunctive can describe a counterfactual situation in the time of narration and a counterfactual situation in reference time.

In the *Aeneid*, only 3 imperfect subjunctives describe counterfactual situations in the time of narration. Two of these are found in book 2\(^{167}\), where Aeneas expresses how close Laocoon was to saving Troy and uses the imperfect subjunctive in combination with *nunc*:

```latex
Example (35), 2.54 – 56
et, si fata deum, si mens non laeua fuisset,
impulerat ferro Argolicas foedare latebras,
Troiaque nunc *staret*, Priamique arx alta *maneres*.
```

And had the gods’ decrees, had our mind not been perverse, he would have driven us to violate with steel the Argive den, and Troy would now be standing, and you, lofty citadel of Priam, would still abide!

I have found 12 imperfect subjunctives in the *Aeneid* that describe a counterfactual situation with respect to reference time.\(^{168}\) An example is found at the start of book six, when Aeneas is looking at the temple doors made by Daedalus. Achates interrupts him.\(^{169}\)

```latex
Example (36), 6.33 – 36
... quin protinus omnia
*perlegerent* oculis, *ni* iam praemissus Achates
*adforet* atque una Phoebi Triviaeque sacerdos,
Deiphobe Glauci, *fatur* quae talia regi:
```

Ay, and all the tale throughout would their eyes have scanned, but now came Achates from his errand, and with him the priestess of Phoebus and Trivia,

Deiphobe, daughter of Glaucus, who thus addresses the king:

Aeneas would have looked more extensively at every part of these doors if Achates would not have stopped him. The imperfect subjunctive forms *perlegerent* and *adforet* are examples of an irrealis, and since the imperfect subjunctive can only be an irrealis of the present, we have to assume that reference time is regarded here as the ‘present’. That is, these subjunctives take reference time as their base, as the present tense form *fatur* does.

4.9 Conclusion

The imperfect tense always denotes a state of affairs that is contemporaneous with an orientation moment in the past of the base.

The imperfect indicative is used in the narrative and the description mode to indicate a situation contemporaneous with reference time. In these modes the base is positioned in the time of narration. Also in the report mode the base is positioned in the time of narration. In

\(^{167}\) The other instance is found at 12.899.

\(^{168}\) The other instances are found at 2.439, 6.31, 6.436, 7.653, 9.513 and 10.372.

\(^{169}\) This is a so-called ‘if not-situation’, a term taken from De Jong (1987:68ff), see §2.4.2. See also chapter 5 for if not-situations with the pluperfect (indicating a position in narrator’s time).
this mode, imperfect tense forms denote states of affairs that are contemporaneous with an orientation moment other than reference time.

The imperfect tense takes reference time as its base in the directing mode, transposed description and transposed report. In transposed report, the orientation moment is in the past of reference time and explicitly indicated. In the directing and transposed description mode, the imperfect tense refers to states of affairs that are contemporaneous with the past of reference time. This becomes clear from the occurrence of certain particles (ecce, iam, et cetera). These interpretations are all connected to the semantic value of the imperfect tense as may be clarified by means of the table below.

Table 4: The imperfect tense: contemporaneous with an orientation moment in the past of base

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Past orientation moment</th>
<th>Base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Report</td>
<td>Explicitly indicated (and not reference time)</td>
<td>Time of narration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Reference time</td>
<td>Time of narration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Reference time</td>
<td>Time of narration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transposed report</td>
<td>Explicitly indicated (completely before reference time)</td>
<td>Reference time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directing mode</td>
<td>Immediately before reference time</td>
<td>Reference time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transposed description</td>
<td>Immediately before reference time</td>
<td>Reference time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As becomes clear from the table, reference time has two functions with respect to the imperfect tense:

1) Reference time functions as the past orientation moment with which the state of affairs is contemporaneous, whenever the base is the time of narration (narrative mode, description mode)

2) Reference time functions as the base in the past of which the orientation moment is positioned (transposed modes).

This may be exemplified by means of two time lines:

Ad 1) Past Orientation Moment Base

Reference Time
Imperfect
Time of Narration

Ad 2) Past Orientation Moment Base

Imperfect
Reference time
(Time of Narration)
All interpretations of the imperfect tense and the amount of their occurrences in the *Aeneid* can be summarized as follows:

**Interpretations of the imperfect tense**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Base in Time of Narration (TofN)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Interpretation of imperfect tense</strong></th>
<th><strong>Base in Reference Time (RT)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Interpretation of imperfect tense</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Report mode</strong></td>
<td>Contemporaneous with explicit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>moment in past of TofN (§4.4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Registering mode</strong></td>
<td>Contemporaneous with explicit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– <em>Directing mode</em></td>
<td>moment in recent past of RT (§4.6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative mode</strong></td>
<td>Situation in RT (§4.2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description mode</strong></td>
<td>Situation in RT (§4.3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The imperfect tense is often described as a ‘background’ tense, in opposition to the perfect tense, which is seen as a ‘foreground’ tense. The next section will contrast the imperfect with the perfect in this (§4.10.5) and other respects.

### 4.10 The Imperfect versus the Perfect: a summary

Now that the interpretations of both the perfect tense and the imperfect tense in all discourse modes have been explained in relation to the semantic value of both tenses, I will discuss the contrasts between these tenses.

The semantic value of the perfect tense is ‘anteriorty to the base’. The imperfect tense denotes states of affairs that are contemporaneous with a past orientation moment. A state of affairs that took place in the past may thus be presented by a perfect tense form or an imperfect tense form. This does not mean that the perfect and imperfect are interchangeable: the perfect and imperfect tense each reflect different ways of presentation (cf. Oldsjö 2001:69, Rijksbaron 1994:2n1). In the sections below, the perfect will contrast with the imperfect in each discourse mode. In the last section, I will go into the distinction between the perfect as a foreground tense and the imperfect as a background tense.

#### 4.10.1 The Perfect versus the Imperfect within the Narrative Mode

The following discussion of the perfect versus the imperfect within the narrative mode deals with a subject that is often connected with the opposition between the perfect and the imperfect: aspect.

Within the narrative mode, and generally speaking, the perfect tense is used for events and the imperfect tense for situations. These uses are in line with the semantic value of these tenses, as I explained in §3.2 and §4.2 respectively. This difference may be illustrated by means of two occurrences of the same verb in both the imperfect and the perfect tense.

The first example contains the perfect tense form of the verb *poscere*, to demand. The state of affairs *posposcit* is part of a narrated sequence (see §3.2 for a more elaborate discussion of this example). The state of affairs *poposcit* is anterior to reference time. We interpret it as one event in the sequence of *posscit, impleit, facta*.

Example (37), 1.728 – 730

Hic regina gravem gemmis auroque *poposcit*  
*impleuit*que mero pateram, quam Belus et omnes  
a Belo soliti; tum *facta* silentia tectis:

Then the queen called for a cup, heave with jewels and gold, and filled it with wine – one that Belus and all of Belus’ line had been wont to use. Then through the hall fell silence:
The perfect tense form *poposcit* is, thus, an event: the act of Dido demanding a cup has a clear beginning and end.

The second example contains an imperfect tense form of the verb *poscere*. The state of affairs *poscebat* is, in line with the semantic value of the imperfect tense, contemporaneous with an orientation moment in the past of base. In this particular example this orientation moment is the first reference time of the story about Salmoneus. The story is told by the Sybille (the subject of *uidi*).

Example (38), 6.585-594

Salomeus, too, I saw, who paid a cruel penalty while aping Jove’s fires and the thunders of Olympus. Borne by four horses and brandishing a torch, he rode triumphant through the Greek peoples and his city in the heart of Elis, claiming as his own the homage of the deity. Madman, to mimic the storm clouds and inimitable thunder with brass and the tramp of horn-footed horses! But the Father Almighty amid thick clouds launched his bolt – no firebrands he, nor pitch-pines’ smokey glare – and drove him headlong with furious whirlwind.

The state of affairs *poscebat* is contemporaneous with reference time, which means that this state of affairs had started shortly before reference time to be in full course in reference time: we enter the story as Salmoneus is already riding (*ibat*) and “claiming the homage of deity” (*poscebat*). The semantic value of the imperfect tense and the use of the narrative mode result in the interpretation of an unbounded state of affairs of claiming (*poscere*). Put differently, the narrator presents an ongoing situation at the start of this short story by means of the imperfect tense.

It is, in my opinion, the contrast between the imperfect and the perfect tense within the narrative mode that has led to the many discussions about aspect in the Latin tense system. The perfect tense is used in the narrative mode for events, and the imperfect is (usually) used for situations, and this difference may indeed be described as an aspektual difference: we might say that the Latin perfect has perfective aspect since it denotes that a state of affairs is bounded (or finished, completed), and that the Latin imperfect has imperfective aspect since it denotes that a state of affairs is unbounded (unfinished, incompleated). However, the notion aspect is only applicable to the perfect and imperfect tense forms within the specific environment of the narrative mode. It is in this mode that the semantic value of both tenses results in the explicit opposition between bounded and unbounded states of affairs (see §3.2 and §4.2). In other environments there is no such opposition, as the next sections will show.

4.10.2 The Perfect versus the Imperfect within the Report mode

The report mode presents states of affairs in their direct relation with the time of narration. If a state of affairs has taken place before this time of narration, it will almost always be presented by means of the perfect tense, on account of its semantic value. This is illustrated in the example below, in which we hear of the fact that Mantus has given his name to Mantua.

Example (39), 10.198-203

Ocnus, too, summons a host from his native shores, son of prophetic Manto and the Tuscan river, who gave you, Mantua, ramparts and his mother’s name – Mantua, rich in ancestry, yet not all of one stock: three races are there, and under each race four peoples: herself the head of the peoples, her strength from Tuscan blood.
The perfect tense form *dedit* expresses that Mantus gave Mantua its name before the time of narration.

Given the character of the report mode, one would not expect many or perhaps not even any imperfect tense forms: the imperfect tense relates a state of affairs to another, past, moment and, therefore, does not present a state of affairs in its direct relation with the time of narration. Nevertheless, some imperfect tense forms do occur in report, as I explained in §4.4. In these cases, the orientation moment is presented in its direct relation to the time of narration. This usually means that a perfect tense form precedes the imperfect tense form, and provides it with an orientation moment, as is the case in the example below. Nautes was taught by Pallas Athena, and this fact is presented by means of report. The perfect tense forms *docuit* and *reddidit* indicate the orientation moment with which the imperfect tense form *dabat* is contemporaneous.170

Example (40), 5.704 – 708

Then aged Nautes, whom, above all, Tritonian Pallas taught, and with deep lore made famous – she it was who gave him answers, telling either what the mighty wrath of the gods portended, or what the course of fate demanded – he with these words essays to comfort Aeneas:…

The perfect tense form *dedit* and the imperfect tense *dabat* in example (39) and (40) nicely illustrate the difference between perfect and imperfect in the report mode. This difference is a direct consequence of the difference between the semantic value of the perfect tense and the imperfect tense.

4.10.3 The Perfect versus the Imperfect within the Directing Mode

Both the imperfect and the perfect tense are used in the directing mode to denote what happened in the immediate past of reference time. Again, a perfect tense form and an imperfect tense form of the same verb will illustrate the difference between the imperfect and the perfect tense within the directing mode.

When the Trojans finally set sail from Sicily to Italy, Aeneas orders to raise the masts and spread the sails. The Trojans respond with considerable speed to these orders: the perfect tense forms *fecere* and *soluere* indicate that in the reference time following that of the order they had already set the sails and let out the canvas (first left, then right).

Example (41), 5.827-832

At this, soothing joys in their urn thrill father Aeneas’ anxious heart. He bids all the masts be raised with speed and the yards spread with sails. Together all set the sheets, and all at once, now to the left and now to the right, they let out the canvas; together they turn to and fro the yardarms aloft; favouring breezes bear on the fleet.

In this example the perfect tense form denotes that the state of affairs *soluere* is completely anterior to reference time (*torquet detorquentque*) and, thus, finished in reference time.

170 The sentence *tum senior Nautes* is ‘rebooted’ by means of *isque* in 708, after the parenthetical lines about Nautes’ education (Williams 1960 ad locum, see also Henry 1883, Conington 1963).
The imperfect tense form *soluebat* in the following example indicates that Aeneas had been paying his dues to the gods for some time at the moment at which book 11 starts. The present tense forms *praecipitant* and *est* indicate that it is in reference time that Aeneas mourns the loss of his friends.

Example (42), 11.1-9
Oceanum interea surgens Aurora reliquit:
Aeneas, quamquam et sociis dare tempus humandis *praecipitant* curae turbataque funere mens *est*, uota deum primo ictor *soluebat* Eoo.
ingentem quercum decisis undique ramis *constituit* tumulo fulgentiaque induit arma, Mezentii ducis exuuias, tibi magne tropaeum bellapotens; *aptat* torantis sanguine cristas telaque truncu uiri,

Meanwhile dawn rose and left the ocean. Aeneas, though his sorrows urge him to give time to his comrades’ burial, and death has confused his soul, yet, as the Day Star rose, was paying the gods his vows of victory. A mighty oak, its branches lopped all round, he plants on a mound, and arrays in the gleaming arms stripped from Mezentius the chief, a trophy to you, great Lord of War. To it he fastens the crests dripping with blood, the warrior’s broken spears, and the breastplate smitten and pierced twice six times.

The past orientation moment with which *soluebat* is contemporaneous is indicated by means of *primo Eoo*. It is made even more explicit in the next line in which perfect tense forms indicate what actions Aeneas had already performed: in reference time he had already planted an oak and arrayed the arms of Mezentius. The imperfect tense *soluebat* indicates that Aeneas had been offering, but leaves implicit whether he had finished the sacrifices. As line 8 shows, the state of affairs was not yet finished: the state of affairs *aptat* is part of the sacrifices as well. This is an important difference with the perfect tense: had the perfect tense been used, the offerings would have been presented as finished before reference time.

The difference between the perfect tense and the imperfect tense in the directing mode may be summarized as follows: the perfect tense presents a state of affairs in a direct relation of anteriority with respect to reference time; the imperfect tense indicates that the state of affairs is contemporaneous with a more or less explicit orientation moment in the past of reference time, leaving the endpoint of the state of affairs implicit.

4.10.4 A Difference in Mode
In the previous sections I discussed the contrast between the perfect and imperfect tense within a certain mode. In my material, there is a specific group of states of affairs in which the contrast between the perfect and the imperfect is, in fact, a difference in mode: the perfect tense forms represent the report mode and the imperfect tense forms represent the narrative or description mode. The contrast in mode becomes clear when we compare perfect and imperfect tense forms which refer to the existence of an entity (e.g. a building or a city) in the story world. The introduction of the city of Carthage is an example of a perfect tense form referring to the existence of an entity in the story world (*urbs antiqua fuit*).

Example (43), 1.12 – 16
*Urbs antiqua fuit*, Tyrii *tenuere* coloni, Karthago, Italian contra Tiberinaque longe ostia, dives opum studiisque asperrima belli; quam Iuno fertur terris magis omnibus unam posthabita coluisse Samo;

There was an ancient city, the home of Tyrian settlers, Carthage, over against Italy and the Tiber’s mouth afar, rich in wealth and stern in war’s pursuits. This, ‘t is said, Juno loved above all other lands, holding Samos itself less dear.

The statement about this city is given in the report mode. It presents information, and introduces the matter of Juno’s fear and hatred of the Trojans. An alternative presentation by means of the imperfect *erat* would have functioned as a setting or *frame* for the following state of affairs and would, as a result, have suggested that the story would start in the next line, and within the city of Carthage, as becomes clear from the example below. After an
Invocation of the Muses, the narrator continues his story and introduces a tower as a spatial setting for the fighting of the next lines.

Example (44), 9.525 – 538
Vos, o Calliope, precor, aspirate canenti quas ibi tum ferro strages, quae funera Turnus ediderit, quem quisque uirum demiserit Orco, et mecum ingentis oras euoluite belli. Turris erat uasto suspectu et pontibus altis, opportuna loco, summis quam uiribus omnes expugnare Itali summaque euertere opum ui certabant, Troes contra defendere saxis perque cauas densi tela intorquere fenestras. princeps ardentem coniecit lampada Turnus et flammam adfixit lateri, quae plurima uento corripuit tabulas et postibus haesit adesis.

Calliope, I pray, inspire me, you Muses, while I sing, what slaughter, what deaths Turnus dealt on that day, and whom each warrior sent down to doom; and unroll with me the mighty scroll of war.

A tower loomed high above, with lofty gangways, posted on vantage ground, which all the Italians strove with utmost strength to storm, and with utmost force of skill to overthrow; the Trojans in turn made defence with stones, and hurled showers of darts through the open loopholes. First Turnus flung a blazing torch and mase fast its fire in the side; fanned by the wind, it seized the planks and longed in the gateways it consumed.

The state of affairs turris erat is not merely an informative remark about the existence of a tower in the story world. Rather, it functions as the start of a new episode, and is comparable to temporal settings such as tempus erat or nox erat, as found at several occasions in the Aeneid. In contrast to the statement urbs antiqua fuit, this state of affairs is presented in relation to other events and situations in the story world: the state of affairs certabant is presented as contemporaneous with it, and the state of affairs coniecit is presented against the setting of both erat and certabant. As such, turris erat is part of the narrative mode.

In the narrative mode, the situations and events in the story world are presented in connection to each other, whereas in the report mode states of affairs in the story world or beyond the story world are presented in connection to the base only. This is why turris erat, being part of the narrative mode, creates the expectation that the narrative will continue and that something will happen within the given setting (Pinkster: 1983:306), whereas urbs antiqua fuit does not create such an expectation.

As a result, the construction with fuit may be used in the course of an episode (i.e. to avoid the idea that a new episode starts), as is illustrated in the example below. The goddess Ops has been given the assignment by Diana to kill whoever kills Diana’s protégé Camilla, and, as soon as she sees that Camilla has indeed been killed, says that she will fulfill her task. In order to do so, she takes up a position behind the tomb of king Dercennus. Before we are given this information, however, the narrator needs to inform us about the existence and location of this tomb, and does so by means of the perfect tense form fuit.

Example (45), 11.848 – 853
... nam quicumque tuum uiolauit uulnere corpus morte luet merita.' fuit ingens monte sub alto regis Dercenni terreno ex aggere bustum antiqui Laurentis opacaque ilice tectum; hic dea se primum rapido pulcherrima nisu sistit et Arruntem tumulo speculatur ab alto. ... for whoever profaned your limbs with this wound will pay the debt of death." Under the mountain height stood a mound of earth, the mighty tomb of Dercennus, Laurentine king of old, screen by shadowy ilex; here first the beautiful goddess, with swift spring, plants her feet, and from the high barrow espies Arruns.

171 Tempus erat: 2.274, nox erat: 3.147; 4.522; 8.26. These temporal settings could not have been construed by means of the perfect tense form fuit. Tempus fuit or nox fuit would mean that at some point in history a particular time or a particular night existed, whereas tempus erat and nox erat means that it was the time or that it was night. Introductions of objects and characters by means of erat are found at 2.543, 7.59, 7.483, 7.601, 9.176, and 9.529. All but one of these introductions (7.601, see §4.1) mark the start of a new episode: the location, the time and/ or the discourse topic changes (cf. Givón 1992:7).
An imperfect tense form would have evoked the impression of the start of a new episode taking place in the vicinity of this tomb, instead of giving the tomb its small role as a ‘prop’ within an episode that is already well on its way. The reported state of affairs *fuit* is used to inform the reader about the existence of an object in the story world *within* an episode, whereas an imperfect tense form *erat* marks the start of a new episode.

Another difference between the (reported) perfect tense form *fuit*, and the imperfect tense form *erat* seems to be that with the perfect tense the narrator explicitly steps out of the story. The narrator, for instance, steps out of his story when announcing Dido’s death (example (47)), but he does not when stating that the founding of Rome was a vast effort (example (46)).

Example (46), 1.29 – 34

His accensa super, iactatos aequore toto Troas, reliquias Danaum atque immitis Achilli, arcebat longe Latio, multosque per annos errabant, acti fatis, maria omnia circum.

*Tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem.*

Example (47), 4.165 – 172

speluncam Dido dux et Trojanus eandem deueniunt. prima et Tellus et pronuba Iuno dant signum; fulsere ignes et conscius aether conubiis summoque ulularunt uertice Nymphae. *ille dies primus leti primusque malorum causa fuit*; neque enim specie famaue mouetur nec iam furtiuum Dido meditatur amorem: coniugium uocat, hoc praetexit nomine culpam.

To the same cave come Dido and the Trojan chief. Primal Earth and nuptial Juno give the sign; fires flashed in Heaven, the witnness to their bridal, and on the mountaintop screamed the Nymphs. That day the first of death, the first of calamity was cause. For no more is Dido swayed by fair show or fair fame, no more does she dream of a secret love: she calls it marriage and with that name veils her sin.

In the reference time of example (46) the vast effort of founding Rome was taking place, and in example (47), this day was not over yet. Thus, both *erat* and *fuit* describe a state that is, with respect to reference time, ongoing. The presentation *tantae molis erat* takes this into consideration, the presentation *ille dies ... fuit* does not. In example (47), the narrator stops telling his story and shifts to the report mode to make an evaluative and prospective remark. In example (46), the narrator adds an evaluative flavor to his story while presenting the state of affairs in its relation to the other states of affairs.

In short, a state of affairs that represents a characteristic of the story world may be presented both by an imperfect tense form and a perfect tense form. In the first case, the narrative mode or the description mode is used, and in the second case, the report mode is used. This section explains this difference by contrasting instances of *fuit* with instances of *erat*, but the contrast holds for all states of affairs that represent general characteristics of the story world. In these cases, the narrator made a choice in mode.

### 4.10.5 Foreground and Background?

A discussion of the Latin perfect and imperfect does not seem complete without the distinction between foreground and background. The imperfect is generally seen as a

---

172 In contrast to this example, a setting for a new episode would coincide with the start of a new verse. As a matter of fact, the instances of *erat* introducing a new entity all occur at the second position in the sentence, preceded by the grammatical subject. The position of *fuit* seems less restricted, e.g. in 2.513, 7.171. Other introductions with *fuit* are found at: 1.441; 2.513; 3.22 (in which case the informational status of the clause is stressed by means of *forte*); 4.457; 6.237; 8.193; 9.381.
background tense, the perfect as a foreground tense.\textsuperscript{173} As Pinkster (1983:304) puts it: “The perfect is used for the ‘actual story line’ (the foreground), the imperfect for the supportive material.” As I explained in chapter 1, I would contend that the opposition between foreground and background may be discerned at at least two levels in narrative texts (and in other text types, Smith 2003:35; cf. also Adema 2002). The first level is that of the global text structure, at which we may distinguish more and less central discourse modes within a text (see chapter 8). The second level is that of a discourse mode itself: within discourse modes some states of affairs are foregrounded, because they advance reference time, and others are backgrounded (see §1.1.1.1). As will become clear below, this is not relevant for every mode.

In this section I discuss the function of the imperfect and perfect on both levels. First, I will discuss the roles of these tenses within the discourse modes. I will argue that in several discourse modes of the \textit{Aeneid} the perfect is a foreground tense and the imperfect a background tense. Secondly, I will briefly go into the level of the global text structure and explain the roles of the perfect and imperfect tense in this respect.

I will start with foreground and background within the narrative mode. As I explained in §1.1.1.1, I choose a more fine-grained division than foreground and background in the narrative mode, consisting of four elements: advancing states of affairs, stationary states of affairs, frames and narrated information. For the sake of clarity, however, I will use the twofold distinction between what is traditionally called the foreground and background in this section. The foreground is constituted by advancing states of affairs, and the rest is background: stationary states of affairs, frames and narrated information. Table 5 compares the perfect and imperfect in this respect.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & Imperfect & Perfect \\
\hline
Foreground (advancing) & 7 & 410 \\
Background (stationary, frames, narrated information) & 176 & 52 \\
\hline
Total & 183 & 462 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Foreground and background within the narrative mode}
\end{table}

The table shows that, within the narrative mode, the imperfect tense is indeed used most often for those elements that can be qualified as background, and that the perfect tense most often represents foregrounded states of affairs. Thus, the perfect can indeed be seen as the foreground tense within the narrative mode.

Also in the directing mode, I consider advancing states of affairs as foreground. Frames and stationary states of affairs constitute the background within the directing mode. Present, perfect and imperfect are compared in table 6 (cf. table 3 in chapter 8).

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & Present & Imperfect & Perfect \\
\hline
Foreground (advancing) & 1731 & 15 & 380 \\
Background (stationary, frames, narrated information) & 942 & 164 & 173 \\
\hline
Total & 2673 & 179 & 553 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Foreground and background within the directing mode}
\end{table}

The present tense is, of course, the foreground tense of the directing mode, but that is not of much relevance here, as this section considers the contrast between perfect and imperfect. In the directing mode, the perfect is used far more often to advance reference time than the imperfect, which occurs mainly as a background tense in this mode.

Within the description mode, the criterion of advancement of reference time is irrelevant: it is characteristic of the description mode that there is no advancement of reference time. The report mode, characterized by present and perfect tense forms, also has no time advancement, and I do not think it relevant to distinguish between foreground and background within the report mode and the description mode. It is better to regard these modes with respect to their function in the text as a whole, which brings me to the level of the global text structure.

On this level, we may distinguish between the story proper and background material such as comment or information. More specifically, we can make a distinction into more and less central discourse modes (Smith 2003). As I will argue in chapter 8 and 9, it depends on the genre, or even on a specific text, which discourse mode is more central than the other discourse modes. As far as the Aeneid is concerned, my conclusion (in chapter 8) will be that the directing mode is the most important mode and that the other modes (report, description, narrative) are subsidiary to this mode.

What does this mean for the foreground and background functions of the tenses in the Aeneid? In order to answer this question we need to go back to the level of the discourse mode. That is, we need to see which tenses characterize a certain mode.

For the directing mode this is, of course, the present tense. Since the directing mode is the central mode in the Aeneid, the present tense can be seen as the foreground tense of the Aeneid. Nevertheless, the present tense also has a background function, for it is, for instance, also the tense that characterizes transposed description. Apart from that, present tense forms taking a base in the time of narration (‘actual’ presents) also have a background function: they occur in the report mode.

Both the perfect and the imperfect tense characterize the narrative mode. Although the narrative mode is the most central discourse mode in many stories, it is not in the Aeneid. In this respect, both the perfect and the imperfect in the narrative mode can be seen as background tenses. The same holds for the perfect tense in the report mode.

As I will explain in chapter 8, the description mode is not per se a background mode. Nevertheless, the description mode, and therefore the imperfect tense, is in the Aeneid often used to provide the actual background, the décor, in which the events and situations take place. This amounts to saying that the imperfect tense in describing sequences has a backgrounding function.

In conclusion, I do not disagree with existing studies on the Latin perfect and imperfect: generally speaking, the perfect is a foreground tense and the imperfect a background tense. However, in the Aeneid both tenses are outranked by the present tense. Above that, there is more to say about the structure of a (narrative) text than the mere distinction into foreground and background.