

Panel
Entering the Underworld (Vergilian Society)
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For the 2009 CAMWS Annual Meeting, The Vergilian Society proposes a panel on ‘Entering the Underworld’. As any student of antiquity knows, not everyone who wanted to enter the underworld could do so, and many aspects of how, why, and where this could be done remain mysterious to us. These problems receive a special focus in Vergil’s *Aeneid*—hence, this panel.

The first of these problems is perhaps the most fundamental: where, exactly, was the grotto of the Sibyl at Cumae located? ‘Re-Entering the Underworld at Cumae: Identifying the Grotto of the Sibyl’ offers an answer that uses archaeology and literary sources to evaluate the two tunnel sites that have so far been proposed for the location of the grotto.

The descent of Aeneas in Avernus is the most famous underworld entrance in the *Aeneid*, but it is not the only one. ‘Allecto’s Descent into the Underworld (*Aen.* 7.565)’ is made through the *Amsancti valles*, modern Valle d’Amsancto, outside Avellino. This is apparently the only place in the central Appenine chain with traces of volcanic action—a suitable place for a fury to enter the underworld.

Any panel on Vergilian underworld entrances must return to the Golden Bough, as two of our papers do. The first, ‘The Bough and the Lock: Fighting Fate in the *Aeneid*,’ argues that Dido’s lock is intimately connected with the Golden Bough and that the ‘hesitations’ of these talismans highlight the conditionality of Fate in the poem, as it affects Dido and Aeneas but also the fall of Troy and the death of Turnus.

‘The Golden Bough and Other Arboreal Tokens for Underworld Transit’ considers the Golden Bough as a cultural universal, a symbol found in the folklore of various world cultures. A variety of Islamic and other European folktales focus on a quest to the underworld, the need for a ‘passport’, and the presence of precious metals and jewels. An examination of these folktales moves our attention away from a search for Vergil’s source to a broader reflection on the meaning of his invention.

In ‘Ovid as Palinurus in the *Tristia*,’ we are reminded that Ovid often compares the land of his exile to the land of the dead. What might this mean? In identifying with Palinurus, Ovid acknowledges that he will not return from the land of the dead, as Aeneas did, but he will have an everlasting name.

These five papers combine archaeology, close reading of literary texts, and the broader themes of cultural studies to show that ‘Entering the Underworld’ is a key theme in the *Aeneid*, one which opens out into a surprising number of interesting areas.

Re-Entering the Underworld at Cumae: Identifying the Grotto of the Sibyl
Steven L. Tuck (Miami University)

One of the thorniest questions in the intersection of archaeology and the testimony of ancient texts is the location of the Grotto of the Sibyl at Cumae. Two tunnel sites so far have been excavated and identified as the oracular base for Apollo's oracle: one in the basin of Lake Avernus and a second on a lower terrace of the acropolis of Cumae itself. Each has supporters who argue that it is the Grotto of the Sibyl known from history and literature. Each of the two, however, fails to match the literary descriptions for the location and form of the Grotto given by Strabo, Vergil and Lucretius while the archaeological remains of each present difficulties given our knowledge of the ritual of consulting the Sibyl.

My study of these sites coupled with analysis of the literary sources allows me to offer a solution to this problem. Each site shows clear evidence of at least two phases of construction: one Greek and the other Roman, probably from the Augustan period. In each case, we see a redirection of the use of the tunnel complex. The Lake Avernus tunnel complex, originally designed to mimic a trip to the underworld, is renovated into a Roman therapeutic bath suite similar to those found at Baiae in the complex of the so-called Temple of Mercury. The tunnel that runs along the west edge of the acropolis at Cumae, however, seems to have been renovated from a defensive military complex into a formal reception chamber whose spatial organization reflects that of the reoriented Temple of Apollo on the terrace above. If these reflect a movement of the Sibyl from Lake Avernus onto Cumae's acropolis in the early first century, this accounts for the disparity in descriptions found in the ancient sources, as they are describing two separate facilities, and reflects the emphasis on Cumae as found in the Augustan period.

Allecto's Descent into the Underworld (*Aen.* 7.565)

Patricia A. Johnston (Brandeis University)

In Vergil's *Aeneid* one finds more than one entrance to the underworld. The most famous, of course, is Avernus in book 6. In book 7, the exhalations at Albunea (*Aen.* 7.83), where Latinus consults the oracle of Faunus, may be another point of contact with the underworld. This site has been identified with modern Solfatara. Later in book 7, however, Vergil provides a very clear description of another entrance to the underworld, namely the 'valley of Amsanctus' (*Amsancti valles*, 7.565).

Earlier in *Aen.* 7.323 ff., Juno summons up Allecto from the *infernis...tenebris* (325), but here there is no indication where the site is from which she emerges. Here Vergil's interest is to emphasize the dire qualities of the fury and the damage she can bring. When Allecto finally returns to the underworld, however, she does so through the *Amsancti valles* (*Aen.* 7.565), modern Valle d'Amsancto, outside Avellino (identified by Mynors in his index as *lacus in Samnio*). Located in ancient territory of the Hirpini, an inland region of which is approximately coterminous with today's province of Avellino, the site is unusual in that it is apparently the only remaining trace of volcanic action in the central chain of the Appenines. There was apparently a temple of Mefitis here. A wooden statue, about five feet tall and dated to the 6th century BC, has been recovered from the site in amazingly good condition.

The Bough and the Lock: Fighting Fate in the *Aeneid*
Julia D. Hejduk (Baylor University)

Much of the *Aeneid*'s power arises from its depiction of Fate: readers are continually torn between exhilaration over Rome's fated dominion and grief for those crushed beneath Fate's overwhelming force. Yet the death of Dido is specifically said to be *not* by Fate, an absence that causes her struggle in departing from life and requires that Iris (acting for Juno) cut a lock of Dido's hair as an offering to the Underworld gods (4.693-705)—a transaction that ancient commentators cite, along with the Golden Bough, as Virgilian invention (*Sat.* 5.19.1-2, *Serv. ad Aen.* 3.46; see J. Rauk, "Macrobius, Cornutus, and the Cutting of Dido's Lock" [*CP* 90 (1995): 345-54]). This paper argues that Dido's Lock is intimately connected with the Golden Bough and that the "hesitation" of these talismans highlights the conditionality of Fate in the fall of Troy and the death of Turnus.

The allusive connections between Dido's death and the Golden Bough are numerous and clear (see C. Weber, "The Allegory of the Golden Bough" [*Vergilius* 41 (1995): 3-35]). In both cases, a golden "tress"—the Lock is *flavus* (4.698), the Bough *auricomus* (6.141)—is removed and made a sacred offering to the gods of the dead in order to gain admittance to the Underworld; the struggle of Dido's soul (*luctantem*, 4.695) resembles the hesitation of the Bough (*cunctantem*, 6.211); *piacula*, *pecudes* (4.636, 6.153), and Proserpina (4.698, 6.142, 251) link the passages as well. The importance of Fate in both episodes makes the connections between them especially significant. The Sibyl tells Aeneas that he will be able to remove the Bough effortlessly "if Fate is calling you" (*si te fata uocant*), but otherwise it will be impossible for him (6.147-48). The puzzle of the Bough's hesitation has plagued readers for millennia: is Fate summoning him or not? Dido's death sheds light on this question, for it is the only event in the poem specifically said to be "not by Fate," and the lack of fatality is the cause of her difficulty (*nam quia nec fato*, 4.696).

The hesitation springing from the incomplete or conditional nature of Fate has important repercussions for two other pivotal events, the fall of Troy and the death of Turnus. Though it is often assumed that these events were necessary to clear the way for Rome, the poet in fact suggests that both Troy and Turnus need not have fallen when they did. As the wounded Dido tries three times to raise herself up (4.690-92), so the Horse gets stuck four times on the threshold of the city (2.242-43); the struggle of the *fatalis machina* (the Horse, 2.237) also resembles that of the *fatalis uirga* (the Bough, 6.409). These links would help to explain a strange and rarely discussed coda to Troy's story, in which Vulcan tells Venus that neither Fate nor Jupiter forbade Troy to stand and Priam to last for ten more years (8.398-99). Similarly, Jupiter tells Hercules that Turnus's "Fate is calling him" (*sua Turnum/fata uocant*, 10-471-72), the same phrase used of Aeneas in reference to the strangely recalcitrant Bough. Jupiter later tells Juno that, as long as the ultimate outcome of the war remains unchanged, she can temporarily "rescue him from impending Fate" (*instantibus eripe fatis*, 10.624), and the wounded Turnus's capitulation offers Aeneas a choice (12.930-38). Like the Bough, the Lock, and the Horse, Aeneas hesitates (*cunctantem*, 12.940); his ultimate decision to kill his enemy is motivated not by strategic considerations but by pain, anger, and a blaze of the same sudden fury (*furiis accensus*, 12.946) that caused Dido's death (*accensa furore*, 4.697).

In the hesitation of key "fatal" objects, Virgil's poetic imagination has created not only a narrative connection among crucial episodes in Aeneas' journey, but also a powerful symbolic language in which to ponder the mystery of Fate and free will.

The Golden Bough and other Underworld transit tokens
Debbie Felton (University of Massachusetts, Amherst)

Vergil's apparent invention of the Golden Bough, and the wood in which it grows, has given rise to much speculation regarding its origin, location, and symbolism. The bough has been linked to the Arician cult of Diana Nemorensis (Servius et al.), to Plato's myth of Er (Michels 1945), and to desecration of nature (Thomas 1988); it has been equated with mistletoe (Frazer 1890, widely panned, e.g. Smith 1973); it has been interpreted as representing life in the midst of death (Butler 1920); or as representing Aeneas's soul (Weber 1995). There is no direct precedent for the Golden Bough in Greek or Roman literature, though Clark (1992) suggests similarities between the bough and the *moly* of the *Odyssey*, along with parallels between Circe and the Sibyl. The wood in which the bough grows has also elicited various interpretations, for example as to whether the *silvae* were Vergil's own invention and whether they represent "ignorance" (as Dante's wood later did). Rather than looking for literary transmission, however, it may be possible to consider the Golden Bough and the wood in which it grows in terms of a "cultural universal", a symbol found in the folklore of various world cultures, and thus neither unique to Vergil nor originating with him.

Despite the variety of interpretations surrounding the Golden Bough, commentators agree that the bough was essentially Aeneas's "passport" to the Underworld: without it, Charon would not have taken him across the river. Many cultures' myths of Otherworld journeys require some sort of token that allows the protagonist to pass where living men should not go, and many cultures' Otherworlds have woods or gardens at their borders, often including trees of gold or precious stones (e.g. Hawaii, the Philippines, Turkey). Perhaps most interestingly, Gilgamesh has to make his way through the Underworld to the garden of the gods, where he finds that the vines and bushes bear jewels such as lapis lazuli, rubies, and emeralds instead of fruit (Tablet IX; Anderson 2000).

More specifically, there exist Islamic and European folktales in which a youth, on a quest to an Otherworld (usually a land of demons), passes by woods containing trees with branches of silver, gold, and diamonds and breaks off a twig from each as proof that he was there before he returns to the upper world. In these cases the material of the trees may echo the passing of the seasons: the silver represents the reflected sunlight of summer, the gold represents autumn leaves, and the diamond branches represent winter's ice (Heiner 2007). The trees may thus also represent the three stages of life—morning, noon, and evening, to paraphrase the Sphinx's riddle. Folklorists and classicists have already drawn parallels between such stories and descents to the Underworld in Greek and Roman myth, as all the stories involve a quest, a trip far down into the earth, the crossing of a river, and entry into a palace of the ruler of the Underworld. Anderson (2000), for example, provides several variants of this tale type (AT 306), but connects *Aeneid* VI to the Grimms' "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" only in passing and seems unaware of the Islamic versions. But the existence and interpretation of such stories, many of which are unlikely to have been influenced by Vergil, may provide a more universal context for the interpretation of Vergil's Golden Bough.

Ovid as Palinurus in the *Tristia*
Samuel J. Huskey (University of Oklahoma)

This paper will examine the influence that Vergil's depiction of the underworld had on one of his immediate literary successors. In the exile poetry, Ovid often compares the land of his exile to the land of the dead, frequently alluding to Vergil's underworld to enhance the comparison. He also compares himself with the characters of Vergil's *Aeneid*, but he seems to have identified with one in particular: Palinurus, the ill-fated helmsman Aeneas meets at the entrance to the underworld.

In the *Aeneid*, Palinurus pleads with Aeneas to give his corpse a proper burial, since otherwise he will continue to wander among the unfortunate and unburied souls on the Stygian marsh. The Sibyl assures Palinurus that not only will others establish a tomb for him, but also the place of his burial (still referred to as Capo di Palinuro), will give him an everlasting name (*aeternum ... nomen*, *Aen.* 6.381). In exile, Ovid finds a kindred spirit in Palinurus. Although he called himself the "Tiphys of Love" in the *Ars amatoria* (1.8), referring to the famous helmsman of the *Argo*, in the *Tristia* he identifies with Palinurus, Aeneas' expert helmsman who unexpectedly falls overboard, dies at the hands of a barbarous people, lives as an outcast among the dead, but finally finds eternal fame.

By comparing himself to Palinurus, Ovid acknowledges that he will not return from the underworld, as Aeneas does. Indeed, like Palinurus, he eventually resigns himself to being an inhabitant of the land of the dead. Nevertheless, he consoles himself with the idea of having an everlasting name, which was, after all, the stated goal of nearly everything that he wrote.

A handout will accompany this paper.