

“Option A or Option B? Yes.”

As is well known, prophecies in Greco-Roman mythology continually came true, often spurred on, unwittingly, by those trying to evade their foretold fates. In the course of ancient epics, some characters, imbued with divine knowledge, also give prophetic instructions to the heroes, granting them the means by which they may continue on their quests. Such characters include Circe, Phineus, the Sibyl, Anchises, and a host of others.

Despite access to divine knowledge, Phineus in Apollonius’s *Argonautica* and the Sibyl in Vergil’s *Aeneid* both give prophetic instructions with two possible outcomes. At the entrance of the Symplegades, the Argonauts are to release a dove, which will either pass through or be crushed (*Argonautica* II.324-44); to cross into the underworld, Aeneas must search a sacred grove and find a golden bough, which will either snap off immediately or will remain fixed no matter how much force is used (*Aeneid* VI.145-8). The strong connection between these scenes may already be seen by the fact that doves lead Aeneas to the tree with the golden bough, a clear reference by Vergil.

Amazingly, the two options in each case are conflated in their actualization: neither comes wholly true, but neither is entirely incorrect either. The dove sent from the Argo loses some of its tail-feathers, but otherwise makes it through the Clashing Rocks; it is not crushed. Much has been made in scholarship of the fact that the golden bough comes off in Aeneas’s hand, but with some hesitation, neither being pried off easily nor clinging fast to the tree. Amazingly, not only were two possibilities given by figures with divine knowledge, but both options combined in the realization of the prophetic instructions. While the actualization of these prophetic instructions have each been

analyzed in their own contexts, the incredible similarities between the two scenes have not been noticed or evaluated before now.

By comparing these two scenes, new insights and conclusions may be drawn for each. This paper examines both, but focuses on how Vergil adopts and recasts the Apollonian precedent; Vergil himself connected the two by means of incorporating doves, which lead Aeneas to the golden bough, into his version. That two possible outcomes of each set of mantic instructions are given and that the reality is somewhere between them is certainly important in our understanding of these scenes and, given the roles that gods play in them, their respective poems as a whole. Moreover, the fact that Vergil is referencing a scene that appeared in an earlier epic must influence modern discussion of the possible resistance he shows to the Augustan regime, a topic on which much ink has been spilled, although this particular facet has never before been given the focus that it merits. This paper will analyze the Apollonian and Vergilian scenes, briefly examine possible influences, then offer conclusions on the importance of each to their respective poems and show how Vergil incorporated this idea from his generic predecessor, shedding new light on a much-discussed passage.

## Bibliography

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