

Richard Heinze declared that seasons in the *Aeneid* “are mentioned where they are needed to motivate the action, but not to lend color or mood to events” (*Vergil’s Epic Technique*, 267). Perhaps the eminence of the critic has allowed that pronouncement to go unchallenged. But it would be surprising if the poet who pays such close attention to seasons in the *Eclogues* and *Georgics* mentioned seasons in the *Aeneid* without any care for their potential symbolic resonance. Moreover, Vergil could have looked to the *Odyssey* for inspiration on the thematic use of seasons in epic, as Homer coordinates the return of Odysseus to Penelope with the transition from winter to spring (cf. Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon*, 239-53). This paper suggests that allusions to seasons in the *Aeneid* do lend color and mood to events. The paper gives special attention to the similes, where seasons tend not to amplify the experience of the moment, but rather to signal transitions, imminent change, growth, or decay.

Autumn appears only once in the *Aeneid*, and that in a simile in the underworld (6.309-10). Souls gather around the Styx like leaves falling at the first frost (*primo frigore*). Vergil invokes Autumn not for itself and its rich harvests, but as a melancholy prelude to winter, linking the ineluctable death of foliage to the ineluctable death of the body.

Winter motivates the action and exacerbates the tensions in the episode of Dido and Aeneas. A winter storm (1.122, 125) brings the Trojan fleet to Carthage; Dido urges the Trojans not to sail in winter (4.52; cf. 4.309); Fama whispers that the lovers heat up the winter (4.193). But in two famous similes Vergil invokes winter to expand our perception of events beyond calendrical time. The emergence of Aeneas for the hunt is likened to Apollo leaving wintery Lycia (4.143-50). The happy and colorful simile perhaps forecasts both the immediate joy of the hunt and Aeneas’ departure from his winter quarters. The simile of the ants preparing for winter (4.401-7), very apt for its visual effects, presents something of a disjunction. From Dido’s vantage point the Trojans behave as if preparing to settle down for winter even as the men hastily drag leaf-sprouting branches (4.399-400) to depart in a season unfit for sailing. The simile underscores imminent change, and the disjunction reinforces Dido’s bewilderment.

*Ver*, springtime, which is so prevalent in *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, never appears in the *Aeneid*. The epic’s seasonal landscape vacillates between the cold of winter and heat of summer. Spring appears indirectly in the aforementioned simile of Apollo leaving wintery Lycia and in the simile of Pyrrhus emerging like a snake after a frigid *bruma* (2.469-75). Allusions to snakes may suggest a hope of renewal (thus Knox, “The Serpent and the Flame”), but the hope in this simile announces the murderous aspirations of Pyrrhus rather than the regeneration of the Trojans.

Summer, essentially a temporal marker for the Trojans’ exile (1.265, 1.756, 5.626), is never enjoyed by Aeneas and his men. Before their eyes, the Carthaginians labor like bees in the young summer (*aestate nova*) to construct their city (1.430-6). The image, borrowed from *Georgics*, is one of joy and hope for the future. Aeneas can only behold from afar the blessed souls in the Elysian Fields, who hover like bees on a clear summer day (*aestate serena*; 6.707-9). In a rare seasonal simile from the second half of the epic, Pallas rallies his troops like herdsman burning brush in summer (10.405-11), a wildly destructive image.

Vergil, a poet well attuned to nature, alludes to seasons as more than temporal markers. Like the astronomical song of Iopas in Book I, the *Aeneid* harmonizes or dislocates human events with a seasonal cosmic order.