

Underworlds in Collision: Homer, Vergil and a Haunted Aeneas

Depictions of interactions with the dead and deadlands are about the concerns of the living and their societies as they manage pasts, presents and futures, and the conflicting demands of individuals, families, society, and cosmos. An individual's personal relationship with the dead often conflicts with the status of the dead within greater religious or political systems, and this disconnect can lead to guilt, a lack of reconciliation, even a certain hauntedness in the living, the unreconciled dead perhaps a danger to the state. With the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (with whom Vergil is in dialogue) providing examples of conflict and resolution of the personal with these exterior demands, I suggested there is a certain hauntedness to Aeneas arising from how his many relationships with the dead (often wrongly or violently killed) are mediated mostly by political/cosmic concerns, which becomes a factor for interpreting Aeneas' violent execution of the unforgiven Turnus, contrasting with the more reconciled Iliadic ending consciously evoked.

The *Iliad's* semi-divine Achilles for his final confrontation carries a shield representing the whole of human life. Patroclus' funeral is deeply personal for Achilles, yet also begins to restore Achilles' relationship with the wider Greek community. Priam's plea mainly concerns the personal and family death rituals, but note how Achilles reframes the personal in the context of the parable of Zeus and the two urns. The *Odyssey's* initial mention of Aegisthus' death and Book Twenty-Four's view of the dead suitors confirm wider plan of justice. But Odysseus is the crafty Everyman trying to get home, and his triumph of the personal found in Tiresias' prophecy that Odysseus will die gently, reconciled, surrounded by his family. Interactions with the dead provoke conflicted and guilty consciences, as seen in Achilles' interactions with Patroclus and

Odysseus' with Ajax and to a lesser extent Anticleia. This negotiation is particularly fraught in the *Aeneid*, a secondary epic, which sets up a new world order supposedly in line with the divine will, an order, in historical terms, built upon a mound of personally and politically inspired death, that guilty, haunted past (Seider) . Note how the dead, often victims of violent death (Dyson), steer Aeneas' life, such as Hector, Creusa, Polydorus, not to mention the deaths of Priam and Pallas. Aeneas has an uneasy relationship with dead Anchises, whom he failed, but whose visions draw him to the underworld. Even Aeneas' *katabasis* requires Palinurus' questionable death whose lack of proper burial is compensated for by public fame. Books Six and Twelve try to justify and harmonize. In Book Six Anchises presents a reworked, Stoic cycle of life and death where particular individuality is washed away, with some souls recycled for that pageant of future Romans Anchises presents, which recalls ideologically tinged Parentalia processions. Aeneas the god bearer is a central gear in the cosmic machinery, as is Anchises and young Iulus/Ascanius. Where is room for Aeneas personal relationships with the dead? Dido was swept aside by the demands of empire, and Aeneas' guilt evident in their underworld encounter. Perhaps the most human and familial relationship Aeneas is with young Pallas. Turnus' evocation of his father in the final scene is clearly meant to echo *Iliad* Book Twenty-Four, where, like Achilles, Aeneas is a judge over life and death. Before Turnus' doomed duel Juno and Jupiter messily sort the future, with Trojan identity, so long protected, absorbed into the Italic (Stahl). Achilles' mercy and, most important, his formation of an almost familial community of tragic sufferers contrasts, as often noted, with Aeneas' furious execution of Turnus (admittedly a liar and a brute) whose soul, (angrily!) goes off to Hades, a killing conducted in the name of another ghost, Pallas (Galinsky), recalling Clytemnestra's claim that a phantom arising from the curse of Atreus was the killer (Ag. 1497). Note how the dead

Deiphobus remains mutilated like Hector's ghost. These underworld references suggest that not only the living, but also the angry dead and what they symbolize pose threats. This impacts Aeneas the demigod/victor, but note the implication that Aeneas the human, although bound to the divine plan, never comes to any peace with the dead, and his life remains haunted, unreconciled, unlike Achilles, but like Achilles as being under the shadow of an approaching death by the river Numicus (O'Hara).

Bibliography

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