

Gladhill, B. and Myers, M.Y. (edd.) 2020. *Walking Through Elysium: Vergil's Underworld and the Poetics of Tradition*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Pp. 320. 978-1-4875-3264-2. \$56.25.

This volume engages with one of the *Aeneid's* most compelling Books, but also one that is most challenging to readers. Book 6 sees Aeneas descend to the underworld where he is confronted with his past, present, and future life, death and reincarnation, as well as with his own unavoidable task of founding a city he will never see. As the title suggests, this volume is concerned with movement, in this case with the movement implied in the literary reception of the poem. The focus is specific, but not exclusive: it covers the reception of *Aeneid* Book 6 in later works of Latin literature as well as Vergil's reception of earlier works in his own text. 'Walking' in this instance, therefore, suggests both forward and backward movement and implies a kind of dance between the text and the reader. This idea is echoed in the fact that the chapters are not ordered chronologically. Rather, the reader is made to wander, like Aeneas through the underworld, through the different receptions of this underworld.

In many of the chapters the idea of walking remains central. In the first chapter, 'Into the woods (*Via Cuma* 320, *Bacoli*)' (pp. 14–30), Alessandro Barchiesi takes us on a walk to the wooded area outside the Sibyl's cave to consider the geopoetics of the *Aeneid*. The performative style of the chapter makes the eerie Avernus forest come alive while Barchiesi reminds us that there is no such mysterious wilderness in Homer or Apollonius. In Vergil, this environment becomes 'an obstacle that needs to be explored and tamed' (p. 22) and Aeneas functions as an explorer and proto-colonizer. This is the often-unnoticed originality Barchiesi sees in Vergil's poem – the resistance of the land to Trojan settlement – which reveals the poet's subjective style and his love of the Italian landscape. In a time of climate change and altering landscapes this originality deserves a second look.

Moving along, Emily Pillinger takes us on a walk in Vergil's footsteps on the *Via Domitiana* in a reading of Statius' *Silvae* 4.3. She considers Statius' employment of time, distance, and speed to reflect the experience of the traveller on this road as well as to reflect on his own 'travels' in literary history, a journey for which *Aeneid* 6 provides a model with Sybil and all. However, whereas Vergil portrays Aeneas' journey to a vision of the future Rome as a *nostos* (signalled by his father's words *quas ego te terras et quanta per aequora vectum | accipio!* 6.692–93), Rome, for Statius, is both central and everywhere and its reach through time and space is eternal. The poet, like

the traveller, may walk up and down the *Via Domitiana* endlessly, never really behind another poet but facing a direction of his own choosing.

Maggie Kilgour also considers *Aeneid* 6's vision of a future Rome in Chapter 3, 'In the sibyl's cave: Vergilian prophecy and Mary Shelley's *Last Man*' (pp. 62–76). She looks at Mary Shelley's interpretation of Anchises' prophecy in her apocalyptic novel. Kilgour notes in Shelley an obsession with predicting the future after her husband's fatal yachting accident. Knowing the future without the ability to change it, however, is the most disturbing form of knowledge and it leaves one with a sense of utter helplessness. This is the message of *The Last Man*, which also reflects Shelley's reading of Anchises' prophecy. Presenting Rome's past and present as a future vision to Aeneas, Vergil portrays history as an endless cycle of death and renewal. Ending with the death of the young Marcellus, Anchises' prophecy offers a vision of an unrealized future, one which Shelley seemed to read as prophetic of her own loss.¹

Chapter 4, 'Exploring the forests of antiquity: *The Golden Bough* and early modern spirituality' (pp. 77–93), looks at early modern spirituality and the interpretation of *The Golden Bough* in the writings of two Renaissance friars from Italy, one with the fortunate name of Baptista Mantuanus, and the other, Giles of Viterbo. In the former, Aeneas becomes an allegory for the theologian with a humanist background who traces Christian truths in the woods of antiquity. The *ramus aureus* is a gift from God which guides the seeker to true salvation. Giles, likewise, interprets Aeneas as the wise man who needs to navigate through the dangers of life (represented by the woods) on his path to wisdom. In his reading, the bough is the goal as well as the starting point of this search for wisdom and helps the seeker to find evidence of the Holy Trinity amidst the 'woods' of ancient literature.

Getting back to the theme of the volume properly in Chapter 5, 'Aeneas' steps' (pp. 94–110), Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui presents a refreshing look at the act of walking as portrayed in *Aeneid* Book 6. Considering the Roman scrutiny of someone's gait as indicative of certain character traits, as well as the function of walking in other books of the *Aeneid* and in Book 6's Greek catabatic predecessors, Herrero regards Aeneas and the Sibyl's walking as more than mere description. Walking may be purposeful, weighty in the corporeal sense (compared to the flitting of the shades), and urgent, with all the additional meanings that these entail. However, Herrero passes over Aeneas' repeated stalling along the way, which could have added another dimension to the act of walking.

A very different kind of walking is performed in the *lugentes campi* where Aeneas sees Dido and other unhappy lovers. This is the focus of Micah Young

¹ Although not mentioned by Kilgour, the *ecphrasis* of Daedalus and Icarus on Apollo's shrine at the beginning of *Aeneid* 6 also hints at this theme.

Myers' chapter on Vergil's engagement with contemporary Latin love elegy and on the reception of Vergil's underworld in later elegiac poetry. Noting in *lugentes campi* wordplay on 'elegy', Myers sees in Vergil's underworld a very different picture of love and the afterlife of poet-lovers from the idyllic one his elegiac contemporaries envision for themselves. A generation later Ovid uses *Aeneid* 6 as a lens to portray yet another take on the afterlife of poets in *Amores* 3.9 and in doing so brings elegy back to Elysium.

Staying with Ovid, Chapter 7, 'Vergilian underworlds in Ovid' (pp. 134–52), by Alison Keith traces the recurrence of Vergil's underworld in the later poet's oeuvre. Ovid, being Ovid, plays with the lofty tone of Book 6 as he subverts Aeneas' serious mission to the racy art of seduction in his *Ars Amatoria*. In his engagement with *Aeneid* 6 in the *Metamorphoses*, Keith notes a similar mischievousness as Ovid downplays Aeneas' exit from the underworld especially. During his exile, however, the underworld is no longer something removed from the poet but part of his everyday experience as he equates his new situation with death. Towards the end of his literary career then Ovid's writings resemble Vergil's in their solemn tone as he reflects on his own premature death.

Bill Gladhill poses an intriguing question in Chapter 8, '*Mortem aliquid ultra est*: Vergil's underworld in Senecan Tragedy' (pp. 153–71), in which he examines Seneca's almost obsessive engagement with Book 6 in his tragedies *Hercules Furens*, *Phaedra*, and *Oedipus*: 'Why was Seneca so profoundly engaged with perhaps the most politically poignant moment of the *Aeneid* in which the republican past slips imperceptibly into the imperial present' (p. 169)? Referring to *Oedipus* specifically, Gladhill detects in Seneca an unmasking of the consequences of Julio-Claudian rule. *Aeneid* 6 provided the tragedian with an inexhaustible account of the underworld which he could employ in various contexts and registers.

In keeping with the theme of tragedy, Fabio Stok considers Servius' commentary on crime and punishment in the *Aeneid* in the next chapter. Servius interprets Vergil's underworld as poetic invention similar to the Epicurean view of the afterlife. However, whereas Lucretius regards the tortures of the underworld as present in our lives, that is, as figments of the imagination, Servius views them as 'on the Earth' (p. 178), in other words, as part of our corporeal existence. This allows him to bypass the Epicurean denial of an afterlife, which would be unacceptable to Christians.

Chapter 10, 'Paradise and performance in Vergil's underworld and Horace's *Carmen saeculare*' (pp. 187–205), is concerned with stamping feet rather than walking feet as Lauren Curtis draws parallels between *Aeneid* 6 and Horace's *Carmen saeculare*. She argues that both texts connect the idea of paradise with performance, the paradise of Elysium in the former and the paradise of the new Rome in the latter. Horace is effectively providing

Vergil's afterlife with an afterlife, Curtis plausibly notes, and bringing back to a ritual performance in the present, the choral voice which Vergil has relegated to myth.

Emily Gowers addresses a very important question in the next chapter: 'Why isn't Homer in Vergil's underworld? – and other notable absences' (pp. 206–23). Perhaps the answer lies in closer scrutiny of the poets' place in Elysium and their potential to be reborn. In the narrative time of the *Aeneid*, Homer might still need to be born; in the time of the epic's writing, he might well have been reincarnated already. I will not give away Gowers' compelling conclusion.

The penultimate chapter looks at hermeneutic walking. Jacob Mackey examines Augustine's curious 'silencing' of Anchises in *Aeneid* 6 even though he models his anabasis with his mother Monnica on Aeneas' catabasis in that book. Instead of Anchises' speech, Augustine employs a translation from Plotinus' *Enneads* in this episode. The result is a two-fold silencing which sees the *Confessions* silencing itself in an attempt to get rid of the pagan texts which brought its author to this climactic point.

Finally, Grant Parker ends the volume with a delightful chapter, which would interest South African scholars especially. He examines the 'spiritualist philology' (p. 242) of Jackson Knight and Theo Haarhoff, through which they aimed to contact Vergil's spirit. Parker argues that we should not simply dismiss such an unorthodox approach since it may disclose new interpretative possibilities precisely through being unconventional. His arguments are compelling.

As the above illustrates, the chapters in this volume are diverse, both in terms of content and methodology, as would be expected in a collected volume of this kind. However, all the chapters are well written and engaging in their own right and there should be something to the taste of any Vergilian scholar. If I have to criticize something, it would be the painting chosen for the dust jacket which accompanies *Walking Through Elysium*. Brave Aeneas leading a bare-breasted, seemingly helpless Sybil past Bosch-esque creatures belies the Vergilian narrative of a hesitant, even uncertain, Aeneas, who has to be reminded constantly by the Sybil to focus on the task ahead. Moreover, the image of a sexualized and 'weak' Sybil who needs the help of a man could be offensive to some. But then again, we do not judge books by their covers.

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