

### **VERGIL'S THREE DOTS (III)**

*In the previous part of my lecture I mentioned freedom versus authority and society and freedom versus fate as two important elements in the content of Vergil's Aeneid.*

*In that context I had distinguished fate for myself as fortunate and unfortunate fate. Reading my paper, I decided during the lecture that it was not yet the moment to speak about the interaction between freedom and fate as unfortunate fate, neither about the interaction between freedom versus authority and freedom versus fate. I said at that moment that it would be better to save these issues for after the discussion in response to the lecture. I also said to the participants of the Palinurus project that maybe it would be preferable to express their thoughts and feelings about these issues in the content of their own creative work rather than discussing them at length.*

*Retrospectively I am very glad that I took this decision during the lecture and that we did not run these subjects into the ground. I am grateful for the significant issues and original views the participants brought up, during the spontaneous discussion after the lecture.*

*As a result I decided not to talk exclusively about my own approach on the theme of freedom and fate, as part three and final topic of my lecture. After the final presentation of the digital shorts of the participants I will reflect in an attachment to my reading in the Palinurus' box on my website on topics and views that came up from the part of the participants, which I have experienced as important, supplementary and refreshing, and to look to what extent they are an essential addition to our initial speculations about Palinurus' disappearance and death.*

### **III. SPECULATION & ELABORATION**

I would like to start this part of my lecture about speculation and the further elaboration of the Palinurus story with a brief look back at the main points of Connolly's speculations about Palinurus' disappearance and death. Firstly to assess - almost 39 years after the moment that I read Connolly's report on Palinurus for the first time - their influence on my own initial speculative interpretation in 1989 for my video work *Palinuro*. Secondly to assess their influence on my re-examination of the Palinurus motif in 1998 for a special, at that time still unspecified project. Thirdly I want to evaluate to what extent they remained relevant after my location research in 2009 and after my continued research until 2017 on antique mythological and literary works and secondary literature for my closet drama *The C of Scylla* as a study for an opera or music drama about my own speculative Palinurus myth and new insights came up.

## MAIN POINTS OF CONNOLLY'S SPECULATIVE APPROACH

(1) The most significant point in Connolly's interpretation of the story is 'the open end' of his speculations: the question on '*the claims of reason versus those of revealed religion*'. At first sight an ironic and maybe also relativistic statement by Connolly as a writer, but for me this assertion has a meaningful sense. (I shall come back to that later, when we are talking about the Palinurus story as a myth.)

(2) Then the question that in Connolly's words Vergil's account is '*full of difficulties*'. Was Palinurus' disappearance a deliberate attempt to abandon Aeneas? A planned act of (a) escape or (b) revenge by Palinurus himself? Or was his death through (c) his own fault or (d) a divine intervention in the shape of a propitiatory sacrifice of the helmsman without guilt?

(3) Connolly does not make final conclusions. Only on two more 'private' and moot interpretations by the author of *The Unquiet Grave* himself - (e) suicide or (f) accident. These reasons he inclines to rule out.

(4) So finally we are left with '*design*' - a planned act of escape and revenge by Palinurus (a and b) - or with supernatural intervention (d), in the shape of a propitiatory sacrifice of the helmsman to Juno, 'who might otherwise have prevented the safe arrival of Aeneas and his whole expedition.'

(5) As a final point there is Connolly's very strongly and - because of his personal situation when he wrote *The Unquiet Grave* - also subjective opinion that the story about Palinurus '*as a myth*' - particularly 'as a myth with a valuable psychological interpretation' - Palinurus clearly stands for (g) a certain will-to-failure or repugnance-to-success, a desire to give up at the last moment, an urge towards loneliness, isolation and obscurity.' But also (h) that 'Palinurus, in spite of his great ability and his conspicuous public position, deserted his post on the moment of victory' and that he 'opted for the unknown shore'.

## CONNOLLY'S SPECULATIONS AND MY PALINURUS AS THE CAPTAIN OF HIS SOUL

Working on *Palinuro* in 1988-89 I did not pay much attention to Connolly's speculative option g: the will-to-failure or desire to give up at the last moment and the urge towards loneliness, isolation and obscurity. In my opinion - at that time but also now - this option is too much of a concept within the framework of Connolly's own mind when he was writing *The Unquiet Grave*.

Option *c*: Palinuro's undeserved death as a supernatural intervention by a god(dess) - a divine intervention in the shape of a propitiatory sacrifice of the helmsman for Juno's appeasement - lacked, and still lacks, credibility for me. Because, after all, until the end of the *Aeneid*, Juno keeps on being irreconcilable against the Trojans and only at the very end of the last book she reluctantly gives up. This means that her appeasement could hardly be a reason for the sacrifice of Palinurus - and if it was, it was apparently a poor judgement from the side of that goddess or god. Option (*d*) sacrifice through his own fault was at that time too unfamiliar for me. This was also the case with (*e*) suicide or (*f*) accident. I followed Connolly's tendency to rule these speculations out.

What remains were the assumptions (*a*) escape and (*b*) revenge, particularly in the sense of desertion - the desertion as described at the very beginning of my lecture. Or in Connolly's words of option *h*: 'Palinurus, in spite of his great ability and his conspicuous public position, deserted his post on the moment of victory and opted for the unknown shore.'

This focus from my side on Palinurus' desertion as main subject of the content of *Palinuro* was largely inspired by Connolly's quote of Jackson Knight in one of his notes at the end of his book. I was speaking about this quote already earlier in the second part of my lecture, in the context of the pessimistic view of the *Aeneid* as basic principle of my video work. Which had to be a *visual* art work - at that time I did not want to make a *narrative* art work because of my personal theoretical art-concept of that moment. Visual art and narration were two separate realities for me.

Consequently the video installation *Palinuro* from 1989 is a work that represents and depicts only by visual means a protagonist who is taking his own responsibility in order to become master of his own destiny. A helmsman, who, while he is thinking about 'the cost of Empire', 'the cost in suffering, and the cost to conscience and to so many graceful things', is taking the decision to get out of his commander's disputable mission in order to become captain of his own innocent soul.

This is where Connolly's and my subject matter rested at the time I was making *Palinuro* and *Miseno* as its pendant. In this double bill or diptych, the twin concepts of protagonist/antagonist - the helmsman Palinurus versus the horn player Misenus, who died the same morning the Trojans finally had arrived in Italy - served me as a guideline, not especially in the sense of opposing characters but also as figures which supplement each other. In this way there was a complementary mutual connection between both works, in which options as accident, revenge and sacrifice through one's own fault were incorporated on Misenus' side.

## FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF MY SPECULATIVE INTERPRETATION OF THE PALINURUS MOTIVE

After finishing *Palinuro* (1989) and *Miseno* (1990) my research on antique literature and myths went further back in time. As earlier from Dante (*Bulicame*) to Vergil (*Palinuro, Miseno*), I went from Vergil to Hesiod (*Vulcano Eolico*), and from Hesiod to the antique literature and myths of Asia Minor (*Faro Anteo*). A mental and intellectual *katabasis* from Dante's *Inferno* to the world of *Gilgamesh* and the *Enuma Elisj*, the Babylonian creation myth.

In the framework of a commission for a design for an exhibition of my video work in Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht, I took up the thread of my unfinished plan from 1988 with the threefold figure Dis from Dante's *Inferno*, now for a new work as part of the mentioned exhibition. The irony is that like in 1988 this plan remained unfinished - the reason can be read on my website (section *Unfinished works* of the submenu *Campo Oscuro*); a preliminary version of *Dis* (entitled *Malebolge*, information also to be seen on my website) has been executed as part of my retrospective exhibition in 2000, in the Dutch Media Art Institute Montevideo / Time Based Arts in Amsterdam of that time.

Working on *Dis* and *Dis/Malebolge* (from 1994 to 1996) I came across a female version of the threefold mythical figure: the Greek goddess Hekate; to the Romans named Trivia or Hecate.

This overlapping directed me to a further study on this subject in the light of Hesiod and the Minoian civilization of the bronze age, which came to an end in the same era when Troy fell.

This 'descent' towards the early Greek world did not mean that my curiosity and fascination about Vergil's work was over. Or that I went along with Farrell's opinion that 'questions that we most want to answer are not Vergilian ones'. 'Descent' has different meanings: descent as a movement downwards (in my case 'downward' in time), but also descent as 'origin', 'provenance', 'source', 'parentage' and 'lineage'. It turned out that, starting with the *Theogony* of Hesiod (who is called once a 'disciple of Hekate') my further studies in the context of the mythological figure Hekate got that meaning too.

(1) HESIODOS' OTHERWORLD. The treatment of my study in the second half of the 90s for a still indefinite project was focused on Hesiod and surviving mythical stories mainly from the Bronze Age, but it was mostly Vergilian characters, which were acting on the foreground. This was because the study of Hesiodos and the literature about the myths of the Bronze Age, and also the review of Vergil's work revealed that in fact Vergil's lines which I liked most, originated from a much older tradition.

I did not foresee that, while writing, a different light was rising on what happened in my mind with Palinurus, and also with Misenus. Different from what I expected and something I began to realize gradually.

I always had been attracted more to the secondary characters and antagonists of Vergil's main work, than to the protagonist and his highbrow kindred circle. When I was re-reading certain passages of the *Aeneid* in the context of my study on Hecate in her capacity as the Roman Trivia, I discovered

that my preference for antagonists and tritagonists had originated from the fact that in these characters the very vital spirit of an old and fascinating tradition is brought back to life. They take us back 'into the shadowy distances of ancient mythology and folk-lore, and thus helps to establish the atmosphere of awe and mystery which Virgil seeks' (*R.D. Williams, The Aeneid of Virgil, New York 1989, p460*). Which fits nicely with Williams' comment on Palinurus' *somnia tristia*, Palinurus' sad dream: "somnia tristia: a vague phrase of foreboding, where *somnia* does not mean specifically 'dreams' but rather 'the sleep that brings doom'" and on the god of Sleep: "a strange other-worldly effect of midnight powers at work".

It is a too long story for this lecture to tell about the results of the study on the development of my Palinurus story from the video installations *Palinuro* and *Miseno* to *The C of Scylla* as a phantasy for an opera or music-theatre play. The main new element in my version of the Palinurus story is an assumed connection between Palinurus and Hekate and from the side of Hekate even a solidarity towards the helmsman of Aeneas.

The study of the 'otherworld' of Hesiodos and his predecessors have made it possible for me to bring together motives and themes, which were still apparently important for me, with the large variety of motives and themes about Hekate's various personifications and associations with other mythological characters and different characteristics and attributes, to my *personal* myth: the myth of Palinurus and Scylla. Which finally also had shed a new light on the relation between Palinurus and Misenus as part of the Palinurus myth. And even on the death of Hesiodos, like Palinurus a worshipper of Hekate, who was thrown into the sea after being murdered, and - parallel with Palinurus - brought ashore, in his case by dolphins, after three days.

(2) THE NARRATIVE GAP OF THE UNKNOWN SHORE. In 2009 I went on with my study on the Palinurus motive which I had started twelve years before in the light of Hesiod's work and the old myths before him. There was one phrase of Connolly which at that time still stuck in my head: 'Palinurus, in spite of his great ability and his conspicuous public position, deserted his post on the moment of victory and opted for the unknown shore.' (*The Unquiet Grave, p137*)

That Palinurus deserted his post was a conclusion I already agreed to from the beginning. Connolly's comment that he opted for *the* unknown shore - and not *an* unknown shore - was something I had completely ignored.

In the beginning (1988-89) I had taken for granted that Palinurus had opted for an unknown shore, because of the emphasis placed on his disappearance as an act of resistance. Desertion as act of despair, but not with a certain goal. In my research in 1997-98 I gave him a provisional shore: at the Sicilian side of the strait between Italy and Sicily. To join the Trojans who had stayed in Eryx on the other side of the island, the city founded by Aeneas after the mutiny of the Trojan women, and Aeneas' travelling companions - both men and women - were given a choice: to live their lives on Sicily, or instead to choose for continuing the expedition to Italy. In 2009, starting over again my

earlier work around Palinurus for my closet drama *The C of Scylla* as a narrative for an opera or music dramatic work, the question could no longer be left open. Also not because of our preference for Palinurus' desertion as an action with intent: a planned act of escape and revenge. So we had to take into consideration that he had a certain, secret destination for, may be a particular mission, while he was paddling with his tiller on the broken stern. And that he had chosen for *the* (that particular) unknown shore - unknown because he had never been on that side of Sicily earlier - as his destination and therefore not for *an* unknown shore.

It is because of the actual character of our Palinurus project in digital operatic shorts not my intention now to speak more about the issue of his destination, neither to give my own answers to these questions. I think for this moment they go beyond the boundaries of our project, but it is a good thing to keep them in mind for your own elaborations. (As I did for my own operatic digital short.)

(3) PALINURUS' BLUFF SAILOR'S MANNER AND THE DESERTION OF AN OLD GUARD. This is about two issues, which had not been raised until I was working on *The C of Scilla*. It goes too far to attend to them here in detail, but it would not be fair to the listener/reader of this lecture/paper to let this subject pass without referring to. These issues - only touched upon by Connolly and not really treated by him - became more and more significant during my elaboration of the Palinurus story as a myth for an opera or music-theatre piece.

What Palinurus' bluff is concerned, I saw myself obliged to correct my initial confirmatory answer on Connolly's question if the helmsman was guiltless. "*Looking for you, Palinurus, bringing you sad visions, guiltless though you are. 'But was Palinurus guiltless?'*" Initially (1988-89) I was so much focused on Palinurus' victimhood, that I merely looked at his innocence. (Merely, not only, which can be concluded from my earlier remarks about the relationship between Palinuro and Miseno in 1990.) But later on, working on the motive of Aeneas' hubris as one of the main issues of the closet drama, I started to realize that also *Palinurus* as captain of his own innocent soul, was not free of a hubris. Self-exaltation with clean hands, even self-sacrifice are not free from a certain degree of pride and haughtiness which casts a different light, or shade if you want, on his decision to stop further participation in Aeneas' *divine* mission.

Because of the same reason - the emphasis merely on Palinurus' desertion as an act of resistance - I paid initially little or no attention to the '*old guard*', mentioned by Connolly: '*who had had enough of him (Aeneas, ndk), who unconsciously did not wish to enter the promised land or to go through with the slaughter necessary to possess it.*' (*The Unquiet Grave* p.136)

Making the video-installation in 1989, but also during my study in the second half of the 90s for the still indefinite project, these issues were not yet so important for me because the content of the work was focused at that time on Palinurus' *somnia tristia*, the helmsman's bad dream. This changed when I was working on my closet drama and there was no escape of going into these issues. Which I did.

(4) THE PROPITIATORY SACRIFICE . According to Connolly, as we have seen, a question of the claims of reason versus those of revealed religion. Or not? Connolly himself gives already a hint to a possible and in my opinion satisfactory answer: to regard the Palinurus story ‘as a myth (...) particularly as a myth with valuable psychological interpretation.’ His stipulation about the content of the Palinurus story (a certain will-to-failure or repugnance-to-success, a desire to give up at the last moment, an urge towards loneliness, isolation and obscurity) is - I already said before - quite personal to the writer of *The Unquiet Grave* himself. But that does not mean that basically his answer shouldn’t be true.

I do agree with Connolly that the case involving Palinurus' death is a question of claims of reason versus those of revealed religion - but then reason and religion not as two opposite elements, but as a fusion between reason and religion as a *revealed* myth. And then not as an epiphany by gods or by prophets, but by being receptive to the whisperings of the Muses - as Hesiod, Virgil and also pious Dante did. Then it is plausible that Connolly's different speculations about the death of Palinurus are not opposing or contradictory presumptions, but explanations that *supplement* each other in a *personal* myth. And the basis for the elaboration of such a myth must be the fusion between inspiration and rational interpretation like that between reason and religion as a revealed myth.

For me - with my undoubtedly, personally colored psychological interpretation - Palinurus deliberately abandoned Aeneas for melancholic and resentful reasons, but at the same time he, through no fault of his own, was also the victim of a supernatural intervention by divine vengeance.

#### WONDRIOUS AFFIRMATIONS OF MY SPECULATIVE PERSONAL MYTH

In myths and antique tragedies the cause of vengeance is by definition never unambiguous. This also applies to my tragedy as a personal myth. For my video projects I always carry out location research as part of the genesis of the work for different reasons. One of them is to get a certain concrete and objective affirmation to the content of the work - as a counterpart for the parallel ‘aesthetic reality’ of the work. (The ‘aesthetic reality’, taken from the aesthete Walter Pater and the writer Jorge Luis Borges is an important concept in my personal art theory.)

In my Palinurus story, written in *The C of Scylla*, there are two important personal assumptions: (a) the special relation between Palinurus and Misenus not only as a *dual* personage but also their mutual tension and hate; and (b) that Palinurus was killed by the sea monster Scylla on his way from South Italy to Sicily. (It goes too far to expand on these subjects now.)

We have read in book 6 in the *Aeneid* (v 377-80) that Palinurus’ body finally got a proper burial and that his name was immortalized by a cape. The Sibyl to Palinurus’ shade:

*But hear and remember my words, to console you in your hard fortune.  
I say that the neighbouring peoples, compelled by portents from heaven  
Occurring in every township, shall expiate your death.  
Shall give you burial and offer the solemn dues to your grave.*

We also have read - book 6 v164 - that Misenus was a son of the god of the winds, Aeolus, who had the Aeolian Islands as his residence.

Please note: (1) the wondrous (celestial) signs from Heaven (*'prodigiis acti caelestibus'*) and (2) Misenus (*'Misenum Aeoliden'*) as a native of the Aeolian Islands - both coming together when (3) I visited the Italian coast at Scilla for my location research as one of the Palinurus locations of my trajectory from Tarquinia in Tuscany all the way to Erice on Sicily.

When I was making a video recording of a sunset on the beach of Scilla - just for a video impression for documentation reasons - I and my camera were witnesses of the phenomenon that at the place where Palinurus in my myth was killed by Scylla, the sunset is in a straight line with the place where Misenus was born. Almost halfway through the period the sun is disappearing behind the horizon, it becomes clear that there is a mountain island partly behind the horizon, which only can be seen because the top of the mountain island extends in a straight line above the horizon and takes a growing 'bite' from the descending disk of the sun.\* (Similarly there were two more coincidences on my private Palinurus locations at the other side of the strait - where in Vergil's words *the abyss as deep is as the sky high* - on which I don't expand now.)

#### THE PESSIMISM OF MYTHS

Once I have read that myths are (always) pessimistic. And I believe this is true. I don't know of any optimistic myths. Recurring motives - overt or hidden - are power, oppression, rape, deceit and hubris. So August should have known the risk of giving the commission for a *mythical* epos to legitimize his own *divine* power and aspirations to a great poet (and not to a propagandist or bootlicker) that the assignment would not end up in a dubious - in my earlier words: a poetic - treatise or a manifesto with a one-directional message, but in a mythical work of art.

My opinion has no doubt: due to the mythical character of the work, the *Aeneid* is *fatefully* pessimistic; ambiguity or not.

I want to end this part about the elaboration of my interpretation of the *Aeneid* and the story of Palinurus with two quotes. One from Connolly's epilogue *Who was Palinurus* at the end of *The Unquiet Grave* (p133), and one from the epilogue *Nemesis* of part one of the fable of my closet drama *The C of Scylla* (p144).



From *Who was Palinurus?* - because of Connolly's strong appeal, and because the golden bough for me is an important symbol in relation to my personal 'aesthetic reality' art theory:

'It would not be fair to the reader to let this subject pass without referring to Mr. W. F. Jackson Knight's fascinating study, *Cumaean Gates* (Basil Blackwell), where he makes the supposition that Palinurus removal of the stem of the ship was a Virgilian echo of the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, in which Gilgamesh, bound for the lower regions, loses some essential part of his boat, and has to cut himself a quantity of punt-poles, even as Aeneas had to cut the Golden Bough, to ensure his crossing to the underworld.'

From *Epilogue (Nemesis)*

I ask myself if the moment when Hekate was defied by her daughter Skylla (the elimination of Hekate's protege Palinurus) and she retreated, like Nemesis later, also has been the moment of the dawn of a new era. An age called by Hesiod the Iron Age.

An age that was his own age, but in his view thoroughly so evil, that he preferred to have died earlier, or to be born later (*Works and Days* v.174-75). An age in which (translation M.L.West): 'Nor will father be like children nor children to father' and will end as follows:

*Then verily off to Olympus from the wide-pathed earth, veiling their fair faces with white robes, Decency and Moral Disapproval will go to join the family of the immortals, abandoning mankind; those grim woes will remain for mortal men; and there will be no help against evil. (id. 197-201)*

You may wonder why Decency en Moral Disapproval, better known as Aidos en Nemesis, have waited until this period to make their way to Olympus. (...) Contrary to what people think mostly: Nemesis was not a goddess of revenge. Vengeance was the domain of the Erinyes, the real goddesses of revenge, like Aphrodite born from the bloody semen out of the cut off penis of Ouranos and assisted by the nymphs Meliai, the Ouranic goddess of love and the unreliable Graces and Hesperides. (Compare Graves 32.3-4, Kerényi 105-08.) Nemesis was originally a goddess of a fate, like the Moirai, who were her sisters. But Nemesis' name did not have the fatalistic meaning of 'providence', but 'due enactment'. The reason why she took a wait-and-see attitude towards her rapist Zeus, can be explained from the perspective of this quality of hers. She knew - and that was her power - that there would come an era that Zeus' power would be eroded and that her violator would be forced to move his principal seat and power base under a different name to somewhere.

So, first Aeneas as his quartermaster to what came to be Rome. Later - under a different name - followed by Zeus himself...

And what about our poor Palinurus - victim of due enactment, more than providence or fate?

A good moment in our story to put our own three dots.

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\* I have used a still of the offline documentary video recording of the sunset at Scilla in a short documentary video clip in my Palinurus box:

[http://www.noldekonig.nl/07e\\_Palinurus\\_box\(Palproject\)/07\\_03\\_05\\_3drwndbds+2cnfgrtns.html](http://www.noldekonig.nl/07e_Palinurus_box(Palproject)/07_03_05_3drwndbds+2cnfgrtns.html)