

Aeneid 6.298–316

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My translation of a selection from Vergil's Aeneid into iambic pentameter. It describes Charon and his routine of taking fallen souls across the river Styx into the underworld.

portitor has horrendus aquas et flumina servat
terribili squalore Charon, cui plurima mento
canities inculta iacet, stant lumina flamma,
sordidus ex umeris nodo dependet amictus.
ipse ratem conto subigit velisque ministrat
et ferruginea subvectat corpora cumba,
iam senior, sed cruda deo viridisque senectus.
huc omnis turba ad ripas effusa ruebat,
matres atque viri defunctaque corpora vita
magnanimum heroum, pueri innuptaeque puellae,
impositique rogis iuvenes ante ora parentum:
quam multa in silvis autumnii frigore primo
lapsa cadunt folia, aut ad terram gurgite ab alto
quam multae glomerantur aves, ubi frigidus annus
trans pontum fugat et terris immittit apricis.
stabant orantes primi transmittere cursum
tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore.
navita sed tristis nunc hos nunc accipit illos,
ast alios longe summos arcet harena.

Horrendous is the ferryman who guards
upon these waters—Charon, foully clothed,
dreadful, a mass of uncomb'd grey out from
his chin. His eyes stand on his face like flames
alight. A sordid mantle knotted from
his shoulder falls. Alone he guides the raft
by pole, maintains the sails, transports the dead
all on his rusty barge. Already old,

but to a god old age is blooming green.
Whole crowds burst out, cascading to these banks.
Down tumble husbands and their wives; behind
them follow high-souled heroes done with life;
and maidens fair and boys placed on the pyre
before their parents' eyes: so many dead.
As many as the forest's fallen leaves
on autumn's maiden frost. As many as
the birds that flock together, sent across
the raging deep by frigid months in search
of sun-struck lands. They stood beseeching spots
on the initial voyage, stretching out
their hands in yearning for the banks beyond.
Yet this dejected boatman grimly takes
now these, now those, and holds the others back,
retained and kept a distance from the sand.