THE
AENEID
The Aeneid of Virgil
Translated by Edward McCrorie, With a foreword by Vincent Cleary
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THE

AENEID

Virgil

Translated by
Edward McCrorie

With a Foreword by Vincent J. Cleary

Ann Arbor

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS
for Robert Bly

tator vatum
On Reading the *Aeneid*

“What is a classic?” is the title of the Presidential Address given to the British Virgil Society by T. S. Eliot during the dark days of World War II in 1944. For Eliot the key idea is maturity: “A classic can occur only when a civilization is mature, when a language and literature are mature; and it must be the work of a mature mind.” The poet who for Eliot possesses these qualities is Virgil, and the epic poem that embodies them the *Aeneid*: “Our classic, the classic of all Europe, is Virgil.”

Fifty years after Eliot spoke these words, I would expand his definition to include America, particularly the United States. I suggest too that this same quality, maturity, is essential to understanding the poem. Finally I argue that maturity is the quality of Edward McCrorie’s fine new translation that most recommends it to readers. It is mature in a way that other American verse translations of the poem are not.

Poets of course, even those breaking untraditional ground like Walt Whitman, Allen Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac, to name three poets very different from Virgil, work with or against a tradition and when they sit down to compose a poem, a long line of poetic predecessors sits just behind them, peering over their shoulders. The would-be poets in turn constantly glance through rear-view mirrors at their artistic forebears. Virgil did so and so does Edward McCrorie.

In my town, Amherst, Massachusetts, for example, Robert Francis, a poet of the first rank, was heir to two other Amherst poets, Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost. Frost’s poems often recall Virgil’s *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, and Dickinson, Horace’s *Odes*, among other poets who influenced them. The two Roman poets in turn look back to and continue, again, not exclusively, the Greek Lyric and Bucolic poetic traditions.

In epic poetry, our subject here, a straight line runs from Milton to Dante, through Virgil, back to Homer. The challenge for the poet working in the epic tradition is to work within this tradition, discretely calling attention to his own literary predecessors, those a literate reader would recognize, while at the same
time working fine, subtle variations on the stock themes and language of epic in order to make his own distinctive voice heard. This is less a contest to establish who is the better poet than to say: "My verse reflects and is a continuation of yours but is different from it, is in fact uniquely mine, not a mere imitation of yours."

The Aeneid is a work that establishes the Roman accomplishment—its tradition, history, and culture—as in every way equal to that of the Greeks; it is also, because of the universal themes it contains, a poem that resonates with what is essential to larger human issues and experiences, including our own American experience. It is not only a poem about Rome. Eliot's dictum needs to be enlarged upon. Our classic, the classic of the entire West, is Virgil.

Maturity. To understand Virgil's poem, its relationship to its Greek predecessors, as well as the importance of the Aeneid in interpreting Augustan Rome and our own American immigrant experience, a different kind of maturity is required. In addition to the kinds outlined by Eliot, the Aeneid requires maturity of its reader. A mature reader will bring to the Aeneid a set of experiences—those acquired in life and vicariously by reading—against which to compare Virgil's words. Where this is not the case, for example, among young readers who are deficient in terms of life experiences, if they are able to bring to the poem a literary imagination, one based on good prior reading, the very act of coming to terms with the ideas and language of the Aeneid can be a maturing experience in itself.

Ambiguity provides a good test of a reader's maturity for it is present in Virgil's poem in a way that it is not in Homer. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in the final scene of the Aeneid, the climactic confrontation between Aeneas and Turnus. After Aeneas takes Turnus' life, and in a most brutal way, readers rightfully ask whether this death is justified, whether Aeneas goes too far, whether Turnus might have been spared. The Aeneid ends in this haunting, perplexing way and it is left to the reader to ponder the resolution.

In the Homeric poems by contrast, similar questions do not linger in the reader's mind. In the Iliad and Odyssey it is more a question of when, less of why or if. When will Achilles return to battle to avenge his friend, Patroclus' death? When will Odysseus and his son Telemachus slay the suitors, all one hundred plus of them, the slaughter itself being a foregone conclusion?

What Virgil asks of his readers is above all an imagination that does not view the poem, and life, in narrowly defined, shadow-
free terms. The *Aeneid* introduces readers young and old to a world very different from Homer's, one however that an imaginative mind, even without a knowledge of Homer, can enter into and enjoy. The *Aeneid* does not presuppose a knowledge of Homer, but with such a knowledge, the experience of the *Aeneid* becomes an even richer one.

In my experience as a teacher, the *Aeneid* initiates adolescents into the varied levels and complexities of the adult, Virgilian world. Young adults, on leaving Virgil's poem, should be better prepared to understand their parents' world and the adult world they themselves will soon be entering, for it is this world that Virgil's poem explores.

Virgil's hero Aeneas is a complex character. Compared to the decisions and choices he is called upon to make, Homer's heroes Achilles and Odysseus inhabit more circumscribed moral, social, and intellectual worlds. Achilles' sense of honor has been violated by the Greek general Agamemnon. Achilles' prize, a slave woman, has been taken from him and he will be satisfied with no other. The best of the Achaean warriors therefore refuses to fight. He retires to his tent and the tide of battle turns against the Greeks. Achilles returns to battle only when his best friend, the beloved Patroclus, dies in his stead, and wearing Achilles' own armor.

Odysseus, after a ten year's absence fighting at Troy and a decade of dalliance and delay in making his way home, uses every trick and stratagem his cunning Greek mind can devise finally to reach Ithaca. There, with the help of his son, Telemachus, and two faithful retainers, the swineherd and the cowherd, he slays the suitors and, with Athena's assistance, once more establishes his right to rule as king in Ithaca.

Two tests remain: the secret of the marriage bed that only he and Penelope possess—eventually he passes this test—and his recognition as son by his father, Laertes, in the final book of the *Odyssey*. By showing his scar to his father and by exactly describing the orchard that Laertes had planted when Odysseus was a boy, the son proves his identity to his father. It is his last, and perhaps most difficult, test. Note that Odysseus reestablishes himself as husband, son, father, king in Ithaca. He returns to that which he was before setting out for Troy. His odyssey, as we shall see, is very different from Aeneas' journey, in almost every respect.

The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are each brilliant masterpieces in their own right, finely honed epics, the products of over five hundred years of oral storytelling in the Greek tradition. They are the
time-tested predecessors of the *Aeneid* and themselves the beginning of the Western epic tradition, yet they portray very different worlds from that of the *Aeneid*. The *Aeneid* begins where the other two poems end. Where Achilles is faced with three major decisions, Aeneas has manifold choices to make: to leave or defend Troy; to return, placing his mission at risk, and search for his missing wife, Creusa, in the burning city, Book 2; to help Dido to found her city or to leave her, Book 4; to accept the Roman mantle his father, Anchises, metaphorically places on his now-Roman shoulders in Book 6 (does he understand what took place in Book 6 or was it all a dream?); in Book 8, to lift to his shoulders the Shield and to accept the Roman future depicted there as he had carried his father from the destroyed city in Book 2; to slay or spare, first, Mezentius, then that enemy’s loyal, devoted son, Lausus, in Book 10; to make a similar choice of his Rutulian opponent, the great Italian leader Turnus, in Book 12. As his father had ordered him to do in Book 6, “spare humble men and war on the prideful,” so Aeneas again and again is confronted by difficult choices.

While by contrast, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* offer less ambiguous, more clearcut decisions, Aeneas is faced with a series of grey-colored choices, where conflicting demands sway him now this way, now that. The world of the *Aeneid* is less a clearly defined world of precise choices required in a more primitive, heroic society, choices of an earlier, less complex, Homeric civilization. Rather, the *Aeneid* involves multidimensional, agonistic choices, often between greater and lesser degrees of good and evil. Such choices exist in the more advanced, developed civilization of the *Aeneid*, a world of history and politics, philosophy and literary tradition, assimilation and mimesis, spheres almost entirely absent from the Homeric poems, as intricate, detailed, and sophisticated as each of these poems is.

Books 6 and 8 of the *Aeneid* provide good examples of such differences. At the end of Book 6, Anchises identifies for his son the individual Roman heroes parading past them. These heroes, descendants yet unborn, begin with the Alban and Roman kings and end with Virgil’s own time, with Julius Caesar, Gnaeus Pompeius, and Marcellus, Augustus’ adoptive son and heir apparent. The son of his sister, Octavia, Marcellus died young, age nineteen, in 23 B.C., a few short years before Virgil’s own death in 19 B.C. Similar historical references are absent from the Homeric poems.

*Aeneid* 8 concludes with the Battle of Actium, 31 B.C., the
defeat of Cleopatra and Antony—the order is significant—by Augustus and his naval commander, Agrippa, effectively bringing to a close the civil discord and chaos that ensued after Julius Caesar's assassination in 44 B.C. Augustus is now the sole survivor, the new princeps of the state. The Republic has ended; the Roman Empire is born.

Historical references of this sort are foreign to the Homeric poems—an important distinction—and effectively define the Aeneid as a poem about time, about history, about tradition and the historical process, how Rome and the Roman Empire came to be:

... Juno's fierce and remembering anger caused him to suffer greatly in war while founding a city, bringing his Gods to Latium, leading to Latin and Alban fathers, to high walls of the Romans.

(1.4–8)

The Aeneid contains more differences than similarities with its Homeric predecessors. It represents an essentially different poem from the Homeric accomplishment.

Why is this so? The Homeric poems reflect earlier aspects, some eight hundred years prior, of the continuing western tradition that form the basic groundwork of Virgil's poem. Virgil had to create a different kind of epic. With the Aeneid, the epic tradition takes a cyclopean step forward, one that requires a more advanced level of understanding, maturity, on the part of its readers. It is a maturity the poem itself helps readers to achieve.

My first exposure to the Aeneid was as a high school teacher in Delaware in 1959 at a private boys' high school. I was in my late twenties, married, the father of one son. I had lived away from home after college doing postgraduate work in upstate New York, leaving home for an extended period for the first time in my life. In my last year of college, I had also lost my father and sister within a six-month period. Finally, after a number of false starts, I had determined on a life's work, to teach Latin and the classical humanities, something I have done ever since.

The main events of my life described here, as I learned from teaching the poem for the first time, had parallel analogues with events of Books 1–6 of the Aeneid. It was a revealing experience for me as I worked through these books with my class for I felt as though my own life were being described in the poem, as though Virgil were speaking directly to me, so closely did I identify with the events portrayed in them. I was not aware of it at the time, but
the poem was also indirectly preparing me for events, as yet unforeseen, later in my life. Best of all, as I now realize, it was doing the same thing for my students.

They were young, seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds, high school seniors, younger in years than I but equipped, many of them, with solid English and Latin reading skills—they were fourth-year Latin students—and they had received a good grounding in literature from their English and romance language courses.

Here was the great thing about the Aeneid that I and my students discovered that year. While the Aeneid is the defining story, at one level, of how Rome and Roman civilization came to be, the poem is above all a highly human story, one that reflects and foreshadows moments common to all of us as we make our way through life. Like every truly classic work, the Aeneid, while recalling past events, was also preparing me and my students for events in our lives as yet unknown, events most of us eventually do experience.

This, I can now say with assurance, is an important reason, perhaps the main reason, for reading this work. It calls upon our mature selves, and in those areas where we are lacking in maturity it helps us to become more mature: it is itself part of this process.

When we are young, the Aeneid shows us what being an adult entails—it partly helps us to grow up; and when we are older, the Aeneid recalls those experiences we have already had, offering a yardstick by which to compare how we responded to significant moments in our lives.

The Aeneid is a poem that treats of human nature and the human condition, and what it means to be adult, a mature person. It is a poem of parents and children, particularly but not exclusively fathers and sons, of love won and lost, of suffering and sorrow, of hope and achievement, of facing obstacles and overcoming them, of confronting the demons without and within us, of showing us how to live and, by implication, how to die. It is a classic for these reasons too.

The Aeneid is also an “American” style poem. People emigrate, they follow religious or economic destinies, they travel far, westward, in ships, they take on the journey only their most precious objects, sacred and familial, to a new world as yet uncharted, to an undefined future, and to the obstacles encountered and to be overcome there. This is a story most American immigrant families, like Aeneas on his journey, can echo event for event.

And yes, the Aeneid also reflects the American story of confronting indigenous peoples and presents a study of the assimi-
lation of foreign culture with the native traditions. To Virgil's credit, this assimilation is unlike the American experience, which is more the shameful story of imposing foreign traditions upon the native cultures and destroying the native tradition in the process, traditions we brought with us from the foreign cultures.

The *Aeneid* also presents the story of the subjugation of native peoples, but with an important difference: instead of destroying the native traditions, assimilation took place, that of the invading people with the native culture. The result is a culture neither Italian nor Trojan but a Roman blend of the two. This fact helps to explain, at least partially, why native people like Camilla and Turnus are portrayed so sympathetically in the poem.

In the light of such subjugation, Virgil's poem raises the age-old question: does the end ever justify the means? and if so, under what conditions? In Aeneas' opponents one can limn many a Native American, just as one can see parallels to modern concerns in the conflicts between the Trojans and Rutulians, on one level, and between Aeneas and Turnus on another. Since both sides in the Italian conflict trace their lineage to Greek-speaking ancestors, one can also see the theme of Civil War experiences, brother fighting brother, carried out by the poet.

Here then are two ways to read the poem, ways that help to define it as a classic work. Experienced readers and imaginative younger readers alike can each read and reread the *Aeneid* at important junctures in their lives. The poem presents new opportunities for growth and understanding at each of these stages, at each rereading. Very few works of literature can pass this test. The *Aeneid* can, it does, and it corroborates Eliot's idea that maturity is the key to understanding Virgil's poem.

*Maturity of the translation.* Edward McCrorie's new line-for-line, verse translation of the *Aeneid* is also characterized by the word *maturity*. The work before you contains these qualities of a mature, readable translation: fidelity to the original, musicality, modernity, and movement. A word on each.

*Fidelity.* This translation provides for Virgil's poem what the translator Richmond Lattimore has supplied for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, a rendering of the original text into English that is faithful to the language and spirit of Homer, in this case, Virgil. McCrorie does this for Virgil's poem. So closely does Lattimore follow Homer's language that students of Greek find it a most helpful tool to use in their own translation of the poem. To their amazement they discover the Lattimore version to be so true to
the original that it is almost a word-for-word, line-for-line translation, often retaining the very order of the Greek words, a difficult feat given the differences between the two languages. McCrorie's translation shows these same virtues.

In Lattimore's Homer, nothing is omitted, every metaphor is translated, nothing is glossed over. Yet—and here is the astonishing part—the result is a highly readable and poetic work in English. McCrorie matches this accomplishment. He slights neither his obligation to Virgil's text nor the responsibility he has to his second-language readers, a fine line to walk—and he does so gracefully. Finally it can be said: we possess a Lattimore-quality translation of the Aeneid, true to the letter and the spirit of the original.

Musicality. Choosing a five-, sometimes a six-beat poetic line, one which mimics the dactyl-trochee rhythm of the last two feet of the Latin line, using harsh consonants to suggest harsh actions, and softer, more euphonic sounds to portray less harsh moments, often too with enjambement or run-over lines as in the original, McCrorie has given us a highly musical reading of the Aeneid. The poem begins:

Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris

which he renders:

My song is of war and the first man from a Trojan
coast . . .

Note the use of cano; "I sing" becomes "my song." The Aeneid, as with all Roman poetry (or for that matter, most later poetry that it inspired), is meant to be sounded out, read aloud, sung. Certain kinds of Latin poetry, lyric, for example, are meant to be accompanied by a musical instrument, a lyre, again with emphasis on how one hears the poetry. How else explain all the care the poet and his translator lavish on the precise way the language sounds? Put this present translation to the reading-aloud test. You will discover it to be melodious, rhythmical.

Modernity. McCrorie's choice of poetic language is modern without being solipsistic or slangy, is idiomatic yet formal and majestic, is neither stilted nor pedantic. Other translators, in order to make Virgil more up to date, have opted for less formal language and a faster moving line. Taken with other omissions and glosses, this produces a quickly moving line but one that is not
quite true to Virgil. The slower paced, more majestic rise and fall of the original, its sonority and mellifluousness, its operatic qualities—all of which we get in McCrorie—are sacrificed in these other translations to a quicker pace, a faster reading. The result, it may be argued in these other translations, is perhaps a more colloquial translation, but less the formal poem Virgil created.

Again McCrorie achieves a delicate balance between language attuned to a late twentieth-century ear while maintaining the euphony and cacophony, the consonance and dissonance, stateliness and symphonic cadence of the original. Here too fidelity to the Latin text is not sacrificed to a more modern rendering.

Movement. Together with the orchestral-like music and the elevated tone produced by it, the reader experiences the passion and emotion of the *Aeneid* in this translation. It affects readers, involves them in the story, makes of them active participants. One cannot be a passive onlooker in this tale. Each reader will have favorite passages once the book is read, but one that I would cite to show movement in the translation is in the last scene of the poem, what McCrorie describes as “Single Combat.” In the following passage, note how closely the Latin word order is retained in English, including the run-over, or enjamed, lines and how rapidly the lines move:

\[
\text{Cunctanti telum Aeneas fatale coruscat,} \\
\text{sortitus fortunam oculis, et corpore toto} \\
\text{eminus intorquet. murali concita numquam} \\
\text{tormento sic saxa fremunt nec fulmine tanti} \\
\text{dissulant crepitus. volat atri turbinis instar} \\
\text{exitium dirum hasta ferens orasque recludit} \\
\text{loricae et clipei extremos septemplicis orbis:} \\
\text{per medium stridens transit femur. incidunt ictus. . . .} \\
(12.919–26)
\]

While he delayed, Aeneas kept flashing the deadly spear. He spotted a chance: he threw from a distance with all his force. Stone from siege-slings have never roared or smashed at a wall, nor has lightning and thunder

\[
\text{cracked so hard: appearing dark as a whirlwind,} \\
\text{bearing its grim conclusion, the spear went flying and} \\
\text{broke through} \\
\text{the corselet’s edge, the seven-fold shield at the bottom,} \\
\text{grinding, and tore through thigh. Turnus was buckled. . . .}
\]
McCrorie, like Virgil, spent many years on this work, and it shows.

The story is told of James Fenimore Cooper, 1789–1851, author of the Leatherstocking Tales, whose best known work is The Last of the Mohicans. Cooper’s father founded Cooperstown in upstate New York, near the Finger Lakes region where many of the son’s novels took place. The future author liked to read aloud to his family and one day, when he was thirty-one years old and at the exact midpoint in his life, not yet having published any novels, he is said, according to his daughter Susan, to have thrown aside the book he was reading and declared: “I can write you a better book than that, myself!” Whether or not this story is apocryphal, Cooper went on to write fifty books, including thirty-three novels during a thirty-year writing career, travel books, political works, and a history of the U.S. Navy. (He had joined the Navy after being dismissed from Yale.) A not undistinguished record, and his daughter started it all.

The translation before you has a similar genesis. My friend Ted McCrorie tells me that his daughter Jeanne was unimpressed as a high school student with two or three English versions of the poem and asked him: “Why don’t you do one?” This translation, many revisions and 10,000 lines later, is the result. Will it be as long-lived as the Cooper novels? It deserves to be.

Above all, as both of these stories indicate, literature, especially Latin literature, is meant to be read aloud. Family reading-aloud is fast becoming a lost art in this country. Read this poem aloud, to yourself, your family, your friends. I believe it is a version of which both Susan Cooper and Jeanne McCrorie (now Jeanne McSweeney) would approve. It sings.

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Contents

A Selective Glossary ........................................ 1
The *Aeneid*: Translator’s Preface .......................... 7
Principal Characters in the Epic ......................... 14
Book I ..................................................... 17
Book II .................................................... 37
Book III ................................................... 59
Book IV .................................................... 79
Book V .................................................... 99
Book VI ................................................... 123
Book VII .................................................. 147
Book VIII ............................................... 169
Book IX .................................................. 189
Book X ................................................... 213
Book XI .................................................. 239
Book XII ................................................ 265
A Selective Glossary

Very obscure or relatively unimportant names, like Acidalian and Lyaean, are not included here, nor are all those names which the poet himself clearly identifies, like Juno, the Tiber River, and Turnus.

Achaean: a synonym in Virgil for Greek
Acheron: a river in the Underworld
Achilles: the greatest warrior on the Greek side during the Trojan War; the hero of Homer's Iliad
Aegaeon: a hundred-handed monster who warred with the gods
Aeolus: god of the winds; also the name of a strong Trojan warrior killed in Italy
Ajax: a powerful Greek warrior during the Trojan war; he profaned the temple of Pallas at Troy
Alba or Alba Longa: a city to be founded eventually by Ascanius, the son of Aeneas, in Italy
Amasenus: a river in Latium in central Italy
Amata: queen and wife of Latinus in Italy, mother of Lavinia
Androgeus: a warrior on the Greek side during the Trojan War
Andromache: the wife of Hector, a prince of Troy, the greatest warrior defending the city during the Trojan War
Anubis: an Egyptian god usually pictured with the head of a dog
Apollo or Phoebus or Hyperion: the sun god and god of the arts, often associated with the nine Muses
Arcadia: a mountainous area of the Peloponnesus in Greece
Argos: an eastern central sector of the Peloponnesus in Greece, the center of Mycenaean civilization, ruled by Agamemnon
Ariadne: a princess on the island of Crete who helped Theseus to make his way in and out of the Labyrinth
Assaracus: an ancient king of Troy and the son of Tros; the grandfather of Anchises and the great-grandfather of Aeneas
Astyanax: the son of Andromache and Hector, killed at Troy
Athesis: a river in northern Italy
Athos: a mountain in Macedonia
Atlas: a Titan, a mythical figure of great strength who was believed to support the world on his shoulders
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Atreus: the father of Agamemnon and Menelaus, the two Greek brothers who
launched the invasion of Troy
Auffidus: a river in southern Italy
Aurora: goddess of the dawn
Ausonia: an ancient name for Italy
Avernus: a lake near Cumae on the western shore of Italy, associated with entry into
the Underworld

Bacchus or Dionysus: the god of wine
Bacchae: women followers of Bacchus, associated with wild rituals
Baiae: a town near Cumae, on the central western coast of Italy
Bellona: a Roman goddess of war
Briareus: another name for Aegaeon
Brutus: a Roman leader who drove the Tarquin kings out of Rome and felt obliged to
kill his own sons for their treachery

Caieta: a nurse of Aeneas; her name was given to a port on the western coast of Italy
Calliope: Muse of Epic poetry
Capri: an island off the western coast of central Italy
Cassandra: a princess of Troy, a prophet whose words were never heeded
Catiline: a Roman who threatened the Roman Republic in Virgil's century
Cato: a leader of the Roman Republic who urged the total destruction of Carthage
Centaur: a mythological and combative figure who was half man and half horse
Ceres: the Roman goddess of grain and bread
Chaos: the name of a god representing the primal, confused state of the world
Chimaera: an Underworld monster, part goat, snake, and lion; also the name of a
Trojan ship

Circe: an island goddess who attempted to enchant Odysseus and his men in Homer's
Odyssey
Cnossos: the ancient capital of the island of Crete
Cocytus: an Underworld river
Cupid: the Roman god of love; a son of Venus
Cybele: a mysterious mother-goddess of Troy
Cyclades: a group of islands off the southeast coast of Greece
Cycnus: a legendary king who while mourning the loss of a friend was turned into a
swan

Cyllenius: another name for the god Mercury, who was born, it was said, on Mt.
Cyllene in Arcadia in Greece
Cynthus: a mountain on the island of Delos
Cyprus: a large island in the eastern Mediterranean associated with a cult of Venus
Cythera: an island off the southern coast of Greece, a center of the worship of
Venus

Danaan: a synonym for Greek; Danaus was an ancient king of Argos
Danae: the founder of Ardea in Italy, the city of Turnus and the Rutulians; she came
from Argos originally where she was the daughter of King Acrisius
Dardan: a variant for Trojan; Dardanus was the legendary founder of Troy
Delos or Ortygia: an island in the Aegean Sea, once thought to be floating, later a
center of the worship of Apollo
A Selective Glossary

Delphi and the Delphic Oracle: in central Greece, the ancient and important oracle of Apollo or Phoebus

Diana: a complex Roman deity, sometimes called Trivia, the “three-facing one”: (1) goddess of the hunt and of forests; (2) goddess of the moon; and (3) goddess, often with the name of Hecate, of the Underworld

Diomedes: a powerful warrior on the Greek side at Troy, who settled later in Italy

Dionysus: another name for Bacchus

Dis: another name for Pluto

Elis: a region on the western coast of Greece in the Peloponnese

Elissa: another name for Dido, queen of Carthage

Elysian Fields or Elysium: a green and pleasant region of the Underworld

Encelesas: a Titan who, for revolting against Jupiter, was buried alive under Mt. Etna.

Erato: a Muse associated with love poetry

Erebus: the son of Chaos; his name is also used for the Underworld

Eridanus: a river of the Underworld

Erymanthus: a mountain in southern Greece

Eryx: a legendary king of Sicily; also, the name of a mountain on Sicily

Etna: a volcano on the southern shore of Sicily

Etruria or Etruscan: an ancient land or people of north central Italy

Euphrates: a river of the Near East

Fates: three goddesses, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, seen as the spinners of life’s threads

Furies: punishing goddesses who often attacked, physically or mentally, criminals or sacrilegious persons

Ganges: a great river in northern India

Ganymede: a beautiful young man, son of Kin Laomédon at Troy, loved by Jupiter and taken to Mt. Olympus

Geryon: a three-bodied monster killed by Hercules

Glauce: a sea god; also the name of the father of Deiphobe, the Sibyl at Cumae; and the name of a Trojan warrior, son of Antenor, mourned by Aeneas in the Underworld

Gorgon: a female monster with snakes in her hair, capable of turning humans into stone

Hebrus: a river in Thrace; also the name of a Trojan warrior killed by Mezentius in Italy

Hecate: another name of Diana

Hecuba: wife of Priam and queen of Troy

Helen: the wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta in the southern Peloponnesus, before and after the Trojan War; taken by Paris to Troy, renowned for her beauty, believed to be a cause of the war

Hercules: a son of Jupiter famous for his strength and accomplishments or “labors”

Hippolyta: queen of the Amazons, near the Black Sea

Hippolytus: a son of Hippolyta, killed when his horses went mad, restored to life, and sheltered by Diana in Italy; he changed his name to Virbius and had a son by the same name
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Hydra: the name of more than one monster with a number of heads

Hyperion: another name of Apollo

Ida: a mountain near Troy, sacred to Cybele

Idomeneus: a king of Crete who fought against the Trojans at Troy

Ilium: another name for Troy

Ilius: another name for Ascanius, the son of Aeneas; the name of a founding father of Troy; and the name of a Rutulian follower of Turnus

Iris: goddess of the rainbow, a helper of Juno

Iulus: another name for Ascanius, the son of Aeneas

Janus: a Roman god of doorways and gates, presented as looking both forward and backward

Labyrinth: a confusing system of caves on the island of Crete, designed by the great artist Daedalus, to house the Minotaur, a dangerous monster who was half man and half bull

Laertes: the father of Odysseus; their home was the island of Ithaca

Lapithae or Lapiths: a people of Thessaly, famous for their battle with the Centaurs

Latium: a large area surrounding the ancient site of Rome

Latona: a goddess loved by Jupiter, and mother of Diana and Apollo

Laurentians: the name of King Latinus' people in Italy

Lavinia or Lavinian: the Italian princess or her land, destined for Aeneas

Lete: the river of forgetfulness in the Underworld

Lydia: an area of Asia Minor; since the Etruscans may have come from there, Lydian may also suggest Etrurian

Manes: spirits of the Underworld

Mantua: a city in northeast Italy; Virgil was born nearby

Mars: the Roman god of war

Maximus: a member of the Fabii family at Rome, called Cunctator, the "Delayer," for his effective tactics in dealing with Hannibal during the latter's invasion of Italy

Megaera: one of the Furies

Metabus: father of Camilla and king of the Volscians

Metircus: Turnus' chariot driver whose form is assumed in battle by Juturna, a goddess and sister of Turnus

Minos: a king on the island of Crete; in the Underworld, a judge of spirits' actions during their lives on earth

Muses: nine goddesses associated with various arts such as epic poetry and lyric song

Mycenae: the great "golden" city of Agamemnon, the center of Argos in the Peloponnesus, from which the invasion of Troy was initiated

Myrmidons: followers of Achilles during the Trojan War

Numicus: a river in Latium

Nymphs: goddesses associated with various rivers, groves, caves, and fountains

Ocean: the name of a god associated with a large and flowing body of water believed to surround the world's lands
A Selective Glossary

Olympus: a mountain in northeast Greece, the home of Jupiter and other gods and goddesses
Orclus: another name for Pluto
Orestes: the son of Agamemnon; the husband of Hermione, he killed a rival, Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles
Orion: a legendary hunter whose name was given to a winter constellation often associated with storms
Orpheus: a great legendary poet of Thrace who almost succeeded in rescuing his wife, Eurydice, from the Underworld
Ortygia: another name for Delos

Padusa: one of the mouths of the Po River in northeast Italy
Pallas: a complex Greek goddess associated with wisdom, battle strategy, and certain domestic arts—her Roman name was Minerva; Pallas is also the name of the warrior son of Evander, king of Pallantium, on the site of ancient Rome
Pan: a Greek god of forests and shepherds
Pandarus: a warrior who fought on the Trojan side at Troy
Panopea: a sea nymph, called a Nereid, a daughter of the sea god Nereus
Paphos: a city on the island of Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean, a center of the cult of Venus
Paris: a prince at Troy who judged that Venus was more beautiful than Juno, thus incurring the latter’s enmity during and after the Trojan War; Paris was rewarded by Venus with Helen, the Greek wife of Menelaus, who with his brother Agamemnon began the Trojan War in reprisal
Pasiphae: the wife of King Minos on the island of Crete; she became, through intercourse with a bull, the mother of the Minotaur; see also Labyrinth
Pelagians: another name for the Greeks
Penthesilea: the queen of the Amazons who fought at Troy
Pentheus: a king of Thebes, a town in Boeotia, driven mad by Bacchus for opposing worship of that god
Phaedra: a daughter of King Minos on the island of Crete, she fell in love with Hippolytus, her stepson, who rejected her love; she then caused his death and took her own life
Phaethon: a son of Apollo who tried to drive the chariot of the sun god across the sky but lost control and was killed by Jupiter
Pheneus: a city in Arcadia
Phlegethon: a river in the Underworld
Phoebus: another name for Apollo, or Hyperion, the sun god
Phoenicia: see Sidonian
Phorcus: a sea god; also, the father of seven brothers aligned against Aeneas in the war with Italy
Phrygians: another name for the Trojans
Picus: a god of agriculture and the grandfather of Latins in Italy; Picus was also the first king of Latium, and the son of Saturn, an ancient god who fathered Jupiter
Pluto: the Roman god of the Underworld
Portunus: a sea god associated with protection of harbors
Praeneste: an old city in Latium in central Italy
Proserpine the "Underworld’s Juno," the wife of Pluto
Punic: another name for Carthaginian

Pyrrhus: the son of Achilles who assumed leadership in battle at Troy after his father’s death

Quirinus: see Romulus

Remus: the brother of Romulus and killed by Romulus

Rhadamanthus: king of Crete, a brother of Minos; after his death, a judge of spirits in the Underworld

Rhea Silvia: a priestess of Vesta, the goddess of the domestic hearth; also known as Ilia, she was the daughter of Numitor, a king of Alba Longa; and the mother, by Mars, of Romulus and Remus

Romulus: the founder of Rome, according to legend, and nursed by a wolf along with his brother, Remus; Romulus gave his name to the city and was later identified with Quirinus, an ancient Italian god

Sabinus or the Sabines: the legendary ancestor or his people who lived in ancient Italy

Salamis: an island near Athens, ruled by King Telamon when Priam, king of Troy, visited his sister, Hesione, there

Samos: an island off the coast of Asia Minor, the focus of a cult of Juno

Saturn: the father of Jupiter; after being driven out of Olympus, according to legend, Saturn settled in Italy, thereby initiating a “golden age” in that country

Sidonian: like Tyrian, used as an epithet for Dido; Sidon and Tyre were cities in ancient Phoenicia, on the shore of Asia Minor

Simois: one of the rivers near ancient Troy

Sirens: beautiful female singers who lured passing sailors to their deaths

Sirius: the so-called dog star, brightest in canis major, the “greater dog,” and often associated with illness

Styx: the river of crucial passage into the Underworld

Syrtis: dangerous sandbanks off the coast of North Africa

Tarquins: a line of early kings of Rome; the name is Etruscan

Tartarus: a region of the Underworld where various criminals were punished

Teucer: an ancient Trojan patriarch; also the name of an enemy of Troy who nevertheless spoke very highly of the Trojans

Tibur or Tiburtines: an old town near Rome or its people

Theseus: a prince of Athens who killed the Minotaur on the island of Crete; later he attempted, with Pirithous, to take Proserpine away from the Underworld

Tithonus: the lover of Aurora, goddess of the dawn

Triton: a sea god, the son of Neptune, proud of his blowing a conch horn

Tuscum: see Etruria

Tyrian: see Sidonian

Umbria: a large area in north central Italy

Vesta: the Roman goddess of the domestic hearth

Virbius: see Hippolytus

Volsciens: a people living in the southern part of Latium when Aeneas arrived in Italy

Vulcan: the Roman god of fire, the forge, and the making of weapons

Xanthus: a river near ancient Troy
The Aeneid:
Translator’s Preface

“Never forget: Virgil was an Italian.” So a colleague told me years ago (admittedly he was Italian) and the implications of his pronunciation were quite clear: Virgil loved his earth dearly, he relished wine and conviviality, and he urged reverence for the gods—of the sky, the middle world and the Underworld. His epic voice rises to the occasion of Italian empire, of courtly formality and splendor, while he laments the inevitability of war, the mystery of divine opposition, the loss of family and friends through age, sickness or battle, and the loss of a lover through Fate—that strange embodiment, Fatum, of divine pronouncements, effata. The dramatically and at times operatically Italian world of The Aeneid unfolds its sea-storms, volcanic rumblings, passionate struggles with the self and with la forza del destino, the full gamut of rage, grief and ecstatic wonder. My colleague’s reminder often kept me in touch with Virgilian essentials.

Others have reminded us of course that The Aeneid is also the epic of Augustan Rome, with all the ancient honor and modern doubt associated therewith, that Virgil is a worthy imitator of Homer, and that the poem is highly representative of a golden age in Latin literature, composed as it was from 30 to 20 B.C. True, Virgil was writing at the end of a bitter civil war in Italy and he hoped to re-establish pietas, translatable (depending on the context) as “reverence” towards the gods, “duty” towards one’s family, and “conscientiousness” towards one’s friends. Aeneas exemplifies pietas best. He is a caring leader of exiled Trojans, he tries to stay (sometimes against his instincts) close to the gods, he loves his father Anchises, his wife Creusa, and his son Ascanius, or Iulus. Although he’s been called “pious” (when pius is translated
simplistically), although Virgil’s pater Aeneas has been rendered simply “father Aeneas” (“the hero is a priest,” one wag has said), Virgil’s central character is a man struggling among human and superhuman forces, sorrowing from one lost home or landfall to another, and determined to keep himself and his people together. Fatherhood is not an evil, nor is reverence an old-fashioned virtue, in this poem.

To some it has all seemed too well arranged. Jupiter, the father of gods, tells Venus in Book I (she is the goddess of love and mother of Aeneas) where things are going generally, giving much of the plot away. If Virgil is the father of Jupiter, in a sense, is the poem simply playing into the hands of the poet? And perhaps into the hands of Augustus, Emperor of Rome in Virgil’s day. Wasn’t he somewhat like Aeneas, having struggled and often killed to achieve his ends, a man who would welcome an epic celebrating the return of ancient order and values in himself?

Yes and no. Virgil’s is a double perspective: gods and demi-gods generally know the direction of events; Aeneas and his people are much less sure. How often they blunder, in fact, misinterpreting signs and speeches from heaven! Aeneas, for example, told to pack up and leave a burning Troy in Book II, repeatedly throws himself into battle instead, sometimes moved by military duty, sometimes by wild rage and despair. For many others—Anchises, Creusa, Dido and Turnus—the world of The Aeneid is not neatly arranged at all. Distinguishing between true and false love, between helpful and spiteful Gods, between right and wrong leaders—frequently all that is impossible for them. Dido involves herself with occult or would-be religion in Book IV, half suspecting her error, hardly able to correct it. As for Turnus, Aeneas’ principal opponent in the war in Italy, his best initial instincts in Book VII are snuffed quickly. When he dismisses alarms about the newly arrived Trojans he is set upon by a sudden madness, provoked by Allecto, an Underworld power. Off he rushes into battle, commanding thousands to join him. Thus, though the overriding thrust of The Aeneid could be called imperialistic (Aeneas and the Trojan-Latin bloodline do triumph), inside the poem is darkness and tension. So much is lost and mourned on the way. The final killing of Turnus himself has struck many as extreme, especially in its matter-of-factness. Virgil’s Roman friends must have wondered: where is the triumphal march, why isn’t the new wealth described in detail, and what about the all-important marriage of Aeneas and Lavinia, King Latinus’ daughter? Virgil does not conclude or perorate. The Aeneid painfully stops.
The human drama of the poem matters enormously. Virgil was influenced by Homer—Books VII through XII are a kind of Iliad, I through VI an Odyssey—but he was also influenced by Greek tragedy, especially by Euripides. The passion of Dido in Book IV has its counterpart in the tragedy of Medea; the Odysseus-Circe story is also there but less insistent. Indeed Virgil is so taken by Dido (in Books I and VI as well as IV) that he allows the emotional center of the poem to drift somewhat away from Aeneas. Thousands of readers from Augustine to the present have empathized profoundly with the Carthaginian queen.

The drama of Book VI is also most compelling. The Underworld through which Aeneas is guided by the Sibyl is vast, complex and crowded with emotion, with figures like the brutally maimed Deiphobus, who recalls the treachery and sadism of the beautiful Helen on Troy’s final night; Dido appears again, grimly silent towards Aeneas and accompanied only by Sychaeus, her husband in a former life at Tyre; and of course Anchises, the proud and garrulous father of Aeneas, overjoyed at reunion with his son—or is it reunion? Three times the son tries to embrace the shadow-like father, and fails. The epic introduction of future Romans by Anchises is not without dramatic interruptions of its own: it pauses, it actually stumbles over human error and setback—the bitter fight between Caesar and Pompey, for example, or the funeral of the boy Marcellus—a loss Anchises begs Aeneas not to inquire about. If Virgil is determined to point up Roman virtues, the power to govern as well as the obligation towards the father—and towards the mother as well, as we see in the mysterious figure of Cybele, mother of all the gods—Virgil is just as determined to hear out, to linger over and care about troubled humans. The Sibyl, taught by a Goddess, urges us to persist along the destined road but Aeneas, taught by the exigencies of the human condition, like us, at times must stop. He’ll speak for instance with Palinurus: what happened after the helmsman fell overboard? Why is he here, on the wrong side of the Styx River? Virgil’s epic design carries us forward; his human drama must give us pause.

How can an English translation capture such poetry, this music so highly praised by Tennyson, a Latin style which William Arrowsmith has called mandarin? Virgil’s language itself may provide clues. He works with a variety of diction (as the excellent new Oxford commentaries point up), even including phrases from Roman comedy; he builds a variety of sentences, from the
most elaborately architectonic to the simplest quip (the latter usually in dialogue); and he orchestrates most carefully, often clustering musical variations, over the course of five or ten lines, around a single vowel-and-consonant theme. Though he has daunted the most ingenious of translators, his epic style is clear in (1) its momentum, an often relentless forward movement that echoes the necessity of Aeneas’ going on despite his human desire to linger and delay, and (2) its melancholy, the lacrimae rerum, the tears shed over human affairs; for mentem mortalia tangunt,—the sorrows of others do touch the human heart. The momentum is often achieved by Virgil’s letting the long dactylic hexameter line run on (unlike the line of predecessors like Lucretius), hurrying story and rhythm along onto the next verse. The second quality he often achieves by crowding consonants and vowels together, building assonance and alliteration, all tending to slow the rhythm, to stress the pathos.

One must also assume a certain strength and resilience in one’s own tongue. The resources of modern English do come up to a translation of Virgil—though perhaps not the resources of any modern English poetry—not the deceptively relaxed and colloquial idiom of Robert Frost, for example, or the Pound of many Cantos, or the Ginsberg of Howl. The style of Yeats in the 1920s, of Robert Lowell in the 1940s, and of Derek Walcott in the 1970s—all might have produced a fine English Aeneid. My version has taken inspiration and courage from their work and from others, since no one can translate Virgil without great help. I gladly credit Donald Hall, who has provided dependably trenchant advice about many a limping, banal phrase. Richard Wilbur led me back more than once to the right, highly disciplined track. The late William Arrowsmith’s encouragement—comprehensive and detailed—has been invaluable. I owe many thanks to the late John Workman at Brown, to Ronald Knox, to many others near and far, including colleagues at Providence like Rodney Delasanta, Charles Duffy, Patrick Reid and Terrie Curran. Forrest Gander, who as poet and publisher of poets is well aware of the resources of modern English, gave his close attention to the entire work. It is Robert Bly who receives the book’s dedication: his support has been the sine qua non.

I strived for an English Aeneid as varied and intense, as momentous and dramatic, as the Latin original, and of course I did not succeed. But what a hearty and heady experience to have strived! Working with a flexible five-beat line for this translation (some have six beats), usually with a dactyl-trochee combination
Translator's Preface

at the line's end (as in Virgil), I often ran one line onto the next and paused after the first foot—another frequent tactic of the original. Without going into all the technicalities, I can claim to have followed Virgil line for line (as C. Day Lewis did in his very able "reading" version): students and teachers of the original will find their place here very readily. I also tried to vary the syntax considerably, as Virgil does, to pay close attention to his occasionally novel diction (well attested to by Austin and others in the Oxford commentaries), and to keep the idiom rather elevated as in the Latin—this was especially hard—without sounding pompous or stiff in the English. Perhaps presumptuously, I even tried to imitate his orchestration often, working with harsh vowels and hard consonants for example when he describes a battle scene. I came to discover and appreciate a hundred intricacies of Virgilian craftsmanship—a great benefit for the poet-translator. Hard and pleasureable as all that was, trying to create a perfect counterpart in English turned out to be far harder—impossible, truly. So I strived for the closest possible equivalent. If the results lead a few ardent souls to take on the Latin itself for the first time, I will be most content.

No doubt the translation nods at times—no doubt the original does—even as Homer nods. But how often Virgil amazes the reader with imaginative energy and passion! I've worked especially hard on those passages. The most striking epic similes, for example, I hope will read well in this translation. Elsewhere it's a little thing, a striking phrase which for a variety of reasons has lost its impact in English translations over the years. When Achaemenides, for example, a lost member of Ulysses' crew, begs Aeneas for help in Book III, he calls the gods to witness, the stars, and hoc caeli spirabile lumen. Three of the words are no problem—"this light of the sky"; spirabile is another matter. Although the Latin verb spirare means "to breathe," giving us the English respiration and inspire, some translators render the passage "the air we breathe" (lumen, or "light" is lost), "by the breath and light of life" (there's no "life" in the original, and caeli or "sky" is lost) and "the vital air" (losing both the "sky" and the "breathing"). Two others retain some of the metaphorical power but warily, diluting the adjective or introducing a relative clause: "by the light of heaven that we breathe" and "this lightsome air we breathe." In the present translation, "this breathable daylight" retains Virgil's metaphor, strange-sounding though it be, and also retains something of the Latin line's rhythm. Clarity is a high priority in translation but I think one has to guard against making
too much sense of this Latin, especially in elusive and highly imaginative moments.

In fact artists as well as poets following Virgil have responded to his most dramatic and imaginative exertions in extraordinary ways. The intense and ambiguous moment in the cave when Aeneas and Dido come together, the ferocious attack of the sea-serpents upon Laöcoön and his sons, the sudden burning of Lavinia’s hair, the dark struggle for a doomed Troy, the crossing of the Styx River, the transformation of Aeneas’ ships into sea-nymphs: these and many other moments have haunted the imaginations of painters, sculptors and translators for centuries. The present writer and illustrator are no exceptions—the hardest thing in the long run, in fact, may be resisting the tendency to linger over and labor—even indefinitely!—the great scenes. Virgil’s power of fantasy may be so pronounced (not only in the Underworld of Book VI) and his capacity for dramatic confrontation so profound (not only in the bitter romance of Book IV) that one closes The Aeneid sensing, momentarily, that reality is behind one, not ahead. The grim vividness and variety of those battle scenes in the later books, the verve and color of the games in Sicily, the warmth and conviction of characters everywhere, down to the last no-nonsense appeal of Turnus—and the no-nonsense reply of Aeneas—all are images that cry out for new expression, in translation and in art, from generation to generation.

The last word, I suppose, should be fidelity. If a translation is not to be a free adaptation, what Robert Lowell called “imitation,” neither should it turn out to be mere transliteration. Because the latter is difficult in prose and quite impossible in poetry, some have despaired of translation altogether, arguing that no attempt will be “faithful” to the original. Too much distortion of sound and sense will take place.

So goes the theoretical opposition. To get from day to day, however, I must be practical. I tried working with the idea that everything really significant in the Latin could take significant form in English; that a final version could be adequately if not absolutely faithful; that it could be readable, too, and enjoyably so. Did I blandly suppose that these two languages could live and work together? Not exactly; it all took a good deal of mediation. Thus a Latin verb might better appear as an English noun here, a specific noun might appear as a general one, and a complex phrase or clause might rearrange itself somewhat in the English—as the famous first line,
Translator’s Preface

Arma virumque cano Troiae qui primus ab oris,

might read,

My song is of war, and the first man from a Trojan coast . . .

Since my idiom derives from writers like Yeats and Wilbur, Lowell and Walcott, some readers may find the style of the translation rather high and solitary, stern at times. But Virgil’s vision and manner are both generally somber and serious. I attempted no novel-writing, no leveling of The Aeneid into pop story and easy message. Every reader has to rise to the occasion of this magnificent epic as he or she can. The rewards, of course, have been known to last a lifetime.

Edward McCrorie
Providence, Rhode Island
August 1990
Principal Characters in the Epic

AENEAS, a Trojan prince through his marriage to CREUSA, the daughter of PRIAM, king of Troy, is the son of ANCHISES, a former Trojan warrior, and VENUS, the Goddess of Love.

ASCANIUS, or IULUS, the son of Aeneas, saved as a boy by his father from the destruction of Troy, is brought by him to Italy, where he will continue the royal line.

JUNO, the Goddess-and-sister-and-wife of JUPITER, King of the Gods, opposes Aeneas and the Trojans generally because of a former judgment against her beauty by PARIS, a Trojan. She sometimes enlists the aid of IRIS, the Rainbow-Goddess, and ALLLECTO, an avenging force (or FURY) from the Underworld.

DIDO, former princess of Tyre, is now queen of Carthage, a city reached by Aeneas and his people on their way to Italy.

SINON, a Greek warrior, managed to deceive the Trojans into bringing a large, apparently ritualistic horse into Troy; the horse was actually filled with Greeks like ULYSSES.

PYRRHUS, who led the Greek forces attacking the palace of Troy, was the son of ACHILLES, the great warrior of Homer’s Iliad. He killed POLITES, one of King Priam’s sons, then Priam himself. He enslaved and married ANDROMACHE, the former wife of HECTOR, Achilles’ principal opponent in the war at Troy.
NEPTUNE, God of the Sea, and PHOEBUS, or APOLLO, the Sun-God, are often helpful to Aeneas, but (like other Gods and Goddesses) not always predictable.

HELENUS, a son of Priam who survived the war, was enslaved by Pyrrhus. He actually comes to rule a small Greek city when Pyrrhus dies. He predicts the future for Aeneas.

NISUS and EURYALUS, two Trojan warriors, the latter a beautiful but impulsive youth, compete in the sprint in the funeral games in honor of Anchises at Sicily, and later volunteer for a dangerous mission at night in the war with the Latins.

DEIPHOBUS, commonly called the SIBYL, an elderly virgin priestess and prophet of Apollo at Cumae (a small city south of Rome), guides Aeneas down through the Underworld.

LATINUS, King of Latium, rules a broad area of central Italy where the Trojans under Aeneas wish to settle. His daughter, now of marriageable age, is LAVINIA.

TURNUS, King of Rutulia, another district in central Italy, is the principal opponent of Aeneas when war breaks out. Favored by AMATA, Queen of Latium and wife of Latinus, he also seeks the hand of Lavinia.

CAMILLA, an ally of Turnus and queen of a band called the Volscians, is a favorite of DIANA, Goddess of the hunt.

EVANDER, King of Pallanteum, an ancient town he founded on the site of Rome, supports Aeneas in the war in Italy and sends his son PALLAS to fight alongside the Trojan leader.

MEZENTIUS, an Etruscan king, opposes Aeneas in Italy together with his son, LAUSUS.

VULCAN, the God of Fire and husband of Venus, helps Aeneas in the war in Italy by constructing weapons, including a supremely hard and beautiful shield.

CYBELE, a mysterious Goddess, Mother of Jupiter, brings about a transformation of the Trojan ships to prevent their being fired by Turnus at one point in the Italian war.