



V I R G I L

The
Aeneid

TRANSLATED BY

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INTRODUCTION BY

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V I K I N G



the VOYAGES of AENEAS

⊙ Port of call

Scale in Miles



BOOK SIX



The Kingdom of the Dead

So as he speaks in tears Aeneas gives the ships free rein
and at last they glide onto Euboean Cumae's beaches.
Swinging their prows around to face the sea,
they moor the fleet with the anchors' biting grip
and the curved sterns edge the bay. Bands of sailors,
primed for action, leap out onto land—Hesperian land.
Some strike seeds of fire buried in veins of flint,
some strip the dense thickets, lairs of wild beasts,
and lighting on streams, are quick to point them out.
But devout Aeneas makes his way to the stronghold
that Apollo rules, throned on high, and set apart
is a vast cave, the awesome Sybil's secret haunt
where the Seer of Delos breathes his mighty will,
his soul inspiring her to lay the future bare.
And now they approach Diana's sacred grove
and walk beneath the golden roofs of god.
Daedalus,
so the story's told, fleeing the realm of Minos,
daring to trust himself to the sky on beating wings,
floated up to the icy North, the first man to fly,
and hovered lightly on Cumae's heights at last.
Here, on first returning to earth, he hallowed
to you, Apollo, the oars of his rowing wings

and here he built your grand, imposing temple.
High on a gate he carved Androgeos' death
and then the people of Athens, doomed—so cruel—
to pay with the lives of seven sons. Year in, year out,
the urn stands ready, the fateful lots are drawn.

Balancing these on a facing gate, the land of Crete
comes rising from the sea. Here the cursed lust for the bull
and Pasiphaë spread beneath him, duping both her mates,
and here the mixed breed, part man, part beast, the Minotaur—
a warning against such monstrous passion. Here its lair,
that house of labor, the endless blinding maze,
but Daedalus, pitying royal Ariadne's love so deep,
unraveled his own baffling labyrinth's winding paths,
guiding Theseus' groping steps with a trail of thread.
And you too, Icarus, what part you might have played
in a work that great, had Daedalus' grief allowed it.
Twice he tried to engrave your fall in gold and
twice his hands, a father's hands, fell useless.

Yes,
and they would have kept on scanning scene by scene
if Achates, sent ahead, had not returned, bringing
Deiphobe, Glaucus' daughter, priestess of Phoebus
and Diana too, and the Sibyl tells the king:
“This is no time for gazing at the sights.
Better to slaughter seven bulls from a herd
unbroken by the yoke, as the old rite requires,
and as many head of teething yearling sheep.”
Directing Aeneas so—and his men are quick
with the sacrifice she demands—
the Sibyl calls them into her lofty shrine.

Now carved out of the rocky flanks of Cumae
lies an enormous cavern pierced by a hundred tunnels,
a hundred mouths with as many voices rushing out,
the Sibyl's rapt replies. They had just gained
the sacred sill when the virgin cries aloud:
“Now is the time to ask your fate to speak!
The god, look, the god!”
So she cries before
the entrance—suddenly all her features, all

her color changes, her braided hair flies loose
and her breast heaves, her heart bursts with frenzy,
she seems to rise in height, the ring of her voice no longer
human—the breath, the power of god comes closer, closer.
“Why so slow, Trojan Aeneas?” she shouts, “so slow
to pray, to swear your vows? Not until you do
will the great jaws of our spellbound house gape wide.”
And with that command the prophetess fell silent.

An icy shiver runs through the Trojans’ sturdy spines
and the king’s prayers come pouring from his heart:
“Apollo, you always pitied the Trojans’ heavy labors!
You guided the arrow of Paris, pierced Achilles’ body.
You led me through many seas, bordering endless coasts,
far-off Massylian tribes, and fields washed by the Syrtes,
and now, at long last, Italy’s shores, forever fading,
lie within our grasp. Let the doom of Troy pursue us
just this far, no more. You too, you gods and goddesses,
all who could never suffer Troy and Troy’s high glory,
spare the people of Pergamum now, it’s only right.
And you, you blessed Sibyl who knows the future,
grant my prayer. I ask no more than the realm
my fate decrees: let the Trojans rest in Latium,
they and their roaming gods, their rootless powers!
Then I will build you a solid marble temple,
Apollo and Diana, establish hallowed days,
Apollo, in your name. And Sibyl, for you too,
a magnificent sacred shrine awaits you in our kingdom.
There I will house your oracles, mystic revelations
made to our race, and ordain your chosen priests,
my gracious lady. Just don’t commit your words
to the rustling, scattering leaves—
sport of the winds that whirl them all away.
Sing them yourself, I beg you!” There Aeneas stopped.

But the Sibyl, still not broken in by Apollo, storms
with a wild fury through her cave. And the more she tries
to pitch the great god off her breast, the more his bridle
exhausts her raving lips, overwhelming her untamed heart,
bending her to his will. Now the hundred immense

mouths of the house swing open, all on their own,
and bear the Sibyl's answers through the air:
"You who have braved the terrors of the sea,
though worse remain on land—you Trojans will reach
Lavinium's realm—lift that care from your hearts—
but you will rue your arrival. Wars, horrendous wars,
and the Tiber foaming with tides of blood, I see it all!
Simois, Xanthus, a Greek camp—you'll never lack them here.
Already a new Achilles springs to life in Latium,
son of a goddess too! Nor will Juno ever fail
to harry the Trojan race, and all the while,
pleading, pressed by need—what tribes, what towns
of Italy won't you beg for help! And the cause of this,
this new Trojan grief? Again a stranger bride,
a marriage with a stranger once again.
But never bow to suffering, go and face it,
all the bolder, wherever Fortune clears the way.
Your path to safety will open first from where
you least expect it—a city built by Greeks!"

Those words
re-echoing from her shrine, the Cumaean Sibyl chants
her riddling visions filled with dread, her cave resounds
as she shrouds the truth in darkness—Phoebus whips her on
in all her frenzy, twisting his spurs below her breast.
As soon as her fury dies and raving lips fall still,
the hero Aeneas launches in: "No trials, my lady,
can loom before me in any new, surprising form.
No, deep in my spirit I have known them all,
I've faced them all before. But grant one prayer.
Since here, they say, are the gates of Death's king
and the dark marsh where the Acheron comes flooding up,
please, allow me to go and see my beloved father,
meet him face-to-face.

Teach me the way, throw wide the sacred doors!
Through fires, a thousand menacing spears I swept him off
on these shoulders, saved him from our enemies' onslaught.
He shared all roads and he braved all seas with me,
all threats of the waves and skies—frail as he was
but graced with a strength beyond his years, his lot.
He was the one, in fact, who ordered, pressed me on
to reach your doors and seek you, beg you now.
Pity the son and father, I pray you, kindly lady!
All power is yours. Hecate held back nothing,

put you in charge of Avernus' groves. If Orpheus could summon up the ghost of his wife, trusting so to his Thracian lyre and echoing strings; if Pollux could ransom his brother and share his death by turns, time and again traversing the same road up and down; if Theseus, mighty Hercules—must I mention them? I too can trace my birth from Jove on high.”

So he prayed,
grasping the altar while the Sibyl gave her answer:
“Born of the blood of gods, Anchises' son,
man of Troy, the descent to the Underworld is easy.
Night and day the gates of shadowy Death stand open wide,
but to retrace your steps, to climb back to the upper air—
there the struggle, there the labor lies. Only a few,
loved by impartial Jove or borne aloft to the sky
by their own fiery virtue—some sons of the gods
have made their way. The entire heartland here
is thick with woods, Cocytus glides around it,
coiling dense and dark.

But if such a wild desire seizes on you—twice
to sail the Stygian marsh, to see black Tartarus twice—
if you're so eager to give yourself to this, this mad ordeal,
then hear what you must accomplish first.

“Hidden
deep in a shady tree there grows a golden bough,
its leaves and its hardy, sinewy stem all gold,
held sacred to Juno of the Dead, Proserpina.
The whole grove covers it over, dusky valleys
enfold it too, closing in around it. No one
may pass below the secret places of earth before
he plucks the fruit, the golden foliage of that tree.
As her beauty's due, Proserpina decreed this bough
shall be offered up to her as her own hallowed gift.
When the first spray's torn away, another takes its place,
gold too, the metal breaks into leaf again, all gold.
Lift up your eyes and search, and once you find it,
duly pluck it off with your hand. Freely, easily,
all by itself it comes away, if Fate calls you on.
If not, no strength within you can overpower it,
no iron blade, however hard, can tear it off.

“One thing more I must tell you.

A friend lies dead—oh, you could not know—
his body pollutes your entire fleet with death
while you search on for oracles, linger at our doors.
Bear him first to his place of rest, bury him in his tomb.
Lead black cattle there, first offerings of atonement.
Only then can you set eyes on the Stygian groves
and the realms no living man has ever trod.”
Abruptly she fell silent, lips sealed tight.

His eyes fixed on the ground, his face in tears,
Aeneas moves on, leaving the cavern, turning over
within his mind these strange, dark events.
His trusty comrade Achates keeps his pace
and the same cares weigh down his plodding steps.
They traded many questions, wondering, back and forth,
what dead friend did the Sibyl mean, whose body must be buried?
Suddenly, Misenus—out on the dry beach they see him,
reach him now, cut off by a death all undeserved.
Misenus, Aeolus’ son, a herald unsurpassed
at rallying troops with his trumpet’s cry,
igniting the God of War with its shrill blare.
He had been mighty Hector’s friend, by Hector’s side
in the rush of battle, shining with spear and trumpet both.
But when triumphant Achilles stripped Hector’s life,
the gallant hero joined forces with Dardan Aeneas,
followed a captain every bit as strong. But then,
chancing to make the ocean ring with his hollow shell,
the madman challenged the gods to match him blast for blast
and jealous Triton—if we can believe the story—
snatched him up and drowned the man in the surf
that seethed between the rocks.
So all his shipmates
gathered round his body and raised a loud lament,
devoted Aeneas in the lead. Then still in tears,
they rush to perform the Sibyl’s orders, no delay,
they strive to pile up trees, to build an altar-pyre
rising to the skies. Then into an ancient wood
and the hidden dens of beasts they make their way,
and down crash the pines, the ilex rings to the axe,
the trunks of ash and oak are split by the driving wedge,
and they roll huge rowans down the hilly slopes.

Aeneas spurs his men in the forefront of their labors,
geared with the same woodsmen's tools around his waist.
But the same anxiety keeps on churning in his heart
as he scans the endless woods and prays by chance:
“If only that golden bough would gleam before us now
on a tree in this dark grove! Since all the Sibyl
foretold of you was true, Misenus, all too true.”

No sooner said than before his eyes, twin doves
chanced to come flying down the sky and lit
on the green grass at his feet. His mother's birds—
the great captain knew them and raised a prayer of joy:
“Be my guides! If there's a path, fly through the air,
set me a course to the grove where that rich branch
shades the good green earth. And you, goddess,
mother, don't fail me in this, my hour of doubt!”

With that he stopped in his tracks, watching keenly—
what sign would they offer? Where would they lead?
And on they flew, pausing to feed, then flying on
as far as a follower's eye could track their flight
and once they reached the foul-smelling gorge of Avernus,
up they veered, quickly, then slipped down through the clear air
to settle atop the longed-for goal, the twofold tree, its green
a foil for the breath of gold that glows along its branch.
As mistletoe in the dead of winter's icy forests
leafs with life on a tree that never gave it birth,
embracing the smooth trunk with its pale yellow bloom,
so glowed the golden foliage against the ilex evergreen,
so rustled the sheer gold leaf in the light breeze.
Aeneas grips it at once—the bough holds back—
he tears it off in his zeal
and bears it into the vatic Sibyl's shrine.
All the while
the Trojans along the shore keep weeping for Misenus,
paying his thankless ashes final rites. And first
they build an immense pyre of resinous pitch-pine
and oaken logs, weaving into its flanks dark leaves
and setting before it rows of funereal cypress,
crowning it all with the herald's gleaming arms.

Some heat water in cauldrons fired to boiling,
bathe and anoint the body chill with death.
The dirge rises up. Then, their weeping over,
they lay his corpse on a litter, swathe him round
in purple robes that form the well-known shroud.
Some hoisted up the enormous bier—sad service—
their eyes averted, after their fathers' ways of old,
and thrust the torch below. The piled offerings blazed,
frankincense, hallowed foods and brimming bowls of oil.
And after the coals sank in and the fires died down,
they washed his embers, thirsty remains, with wine.
Corynaeus sealed the bones he culled in a bronze urn,
then circling his comrades three times with pure water,
sprinkling light drops from a blooming olive spray,
he cleansed the men and voiced the last farewell.
But devout Aeneas mounds the tomb—an immense barrow
crowned with the man's own gear, his oar and trumpet—
under a steep headland, called after the herald now
and for all time to come it bears Misenus' name.
The rite
performed, Aeneas hurries to carry out the Sibyl's orders.
There was a vast cave deep in the gaping, jagged rock,
shielded well by a dusky lake and shadowed grove.
Over it no bird on earth could make its way unscathed,
such poisonous vapors steamed up from its dark throat
to cloud the arching sky. Here, as her first step,
the priestess steadies four black-backed calves,
she tips wine on their brows, then plucks some tufts
from the crown between their horns and casts them
over the altar fire, first offerings, crying out
to Hecate, mighty Queen of Heaven and Hell.
Attendants run knives under throats and catch
warm blood in bowls. Aeneas himself, sword drawn,
slaughters a black-fleeced lamb to the Furies' mother,
Night, and to her great sister, Earth, and to you,
Proserpina, kills a barren heifer. Then to the king
of the river Styx, he raises altars into the dark night
and over their fires lays whole carcasses of bulls
and pours fat oil over their entrails flaming up.
Then suddenly, look, at the break of day, first light,
the earth groans underfoot and the wooded heights quake
and across the gloom the hounds seem to howl
at the goddess coming closer.

“Away, away!”

the Sibyl shrieks, “all you unhallowed ones—away from this whole grove! But you launch out on your journey, tear your sword from its sheath, Aeneas. Now for courage, now the steady heart!” And the Sibyl says no more but into the yawning cave she flings herself, possessed—he follows her boldly, matching stride for stride.

You gods

who govern the realm of ghosts, you voiceless shades and Chaos—you, the River of Fire, you far-flung regions hushed in night—lend me the right to tell what I have heard, lend your power to reveal the world immersed in the misty depths of earth.

On they went, those dim travelers under the lonely night, through gloom and the empty halls of Death’s ghostly realm, like those who walk through woods by a grudging moon’s deceptive light when Jove has plunged the sky in dark and the black night drains all color from the world.

There in the entryway, the gorge of hell itself, Grief and the pangs of Conscience make their beds, and fatal pale Disease lives there, and bleak Old Age, Dread and Hunger, seductress to crime, and grinding Poverty, all, terrible shapes to see—and Death and deadly Struggle and Sleep, twin brother of Death, and twisted, wicked Joys and facing them at the threshold, War, rife with death, and the Furies’ iron chambers, and mad, raging Strife whose blood-stained headbands knot her snaky locks.

There in the midst, a giant shadowy elm tree spreads her ancient branching arms, home, they say, to swarms of false dreams, one clinging tight under each leaf.

And a throng of monsters too—what brutal forms are stabled at the gates—Centaur, mongrel Scyllas, part women, part beasts, and hundred-handed Briareus and the savage Hydra of Lerna, that hissing horror, the Chimaera armed with torches—Gorgons, Harpies and triple-bodied Geryon, his great ghost. And here, instantly struck with terror, Aeneas grips his sword and offers its naked edge against them as they come, and if his experienced comrade had not warned him they are mere disembodied creatures, flimsy

will-o'-the-wisps that flit like living forms,
he would have rushed them all,
slashed through empty phantoms with his blade.
From there
the road leads down to the Acheron's Tartarean waves.
Here the enormous whirlpool gapes aswirl with filth,
seethes and spews out all its silt in the Wailing River.
And here the dreaded ferryman guards the flood,
grisly in his squalor—Charon . . .
his scraggly beard a tangled mat of white, his eyes
fixed in a fiery stare, and his grimy rags hang down
from his shoulders by a knot. But all on his own
he punts his craft with a pole and hoists sail
as he ferries the dead souls in his rust-red skiff.
He's on in years, but a god's old age is hale and green.

A huge throng of the dead came streaming toward the banks:
mothers and grown men and ghosts of great-souled heroes,
their bodies stripped of life, and boys and unwed girls
and sons laid on the pyre before their parents' eyes.
As thick as leaves in autumn woods at the first frost
that slip and float to earth, or dense as flocks of birds
that wing from the heaving sea to shore when winter's chill
drives them over the waves to landfalls drenched in sunlight.
There they stood, pleading to be the first ones ferried over,
reaching out their hands in longing toward the farther shore.
But the grim ferryman ushers aboard now these, now those,
others he thrusts away, back from the water's edge.
Aeneas,
astonished, stirred by the tumult, calls out: "Tell me,
Sibyl, what does it mean, this thronging toward the river?
What do the dead souls want? What divides them all?
Some are turned away from the banks and others
scull the murky waters with their oars!"

The aged priestess answered Aeneas briefly:
"Son of Anchises—born of the gods, no doubt—
what you see are Cocytus' pools and Styx's marsh,
Powers by which the gods swear oaths they dare not break.
And the great rout you see is helpless, still not buried.
That ferryman there is Charon. Those borne by the stream

have found their graves. And no spirits may be conveyed
across the horrendous banks and hoarse, roaring flood
until their bones are buried, and they rest in peace . . .
A hundred years they wander, hovering round these shores
till at last they may return and see once more the pools
they long to cross.”

Anchises’ son came to a halt
and stood there, pondering long, while pity filled his heart,
their lot so hard, unjust. And then he spots two men,
grief-stricken and robbed of death’s last tribute:
Leucaspis and Orontes, the Lycian fleet’s commander.
Together they sailed from Troy over windswept seas
and a Southern gale sprang up and
toppling breakers crushed their ships and crews.

Look,
the pilot Palinurus was drifting toward him now,
fresh from the Libyan run where, watching the stars,
he plunged from his stern, pitched out in heavy seas.
Aeneas, barely sighting him grieving in the shadows,
hailed him first: “What god, Palinurus, snatched you
from our midst and drowned you in open waters?
Tell me, please. Apollo has never lied before.
This is his one reply that’s played me false:
he swore you would cross the ocean safe and sound
and reach Italian shores. Is *this* the end he promised?”

But the pilot answered: “Captain, Anchises’ son,
Apollo’s prophetic cauldron has not failed you—
no god drowned me in open waters. No, the rudder
I clung to, holding us all on course—my charge—
some powerful force ripped it away by chance
and I dragged it down as I dropped headlong too.
By the cruel seas I swear I felt no fear for myself
to match my fear that your ship, stripped of her tiller,
steersman wrenched away, might founder in that great surge.
Three blustery winter nights the Southwind bore me wildly
over the endless waters, then at the fourth dawn, swept up
on a breaker’s crest, I could almost sight it now—Italy!
Stroke by stroke I swam for land, safety was in my grasp,
weighed down by my sodden clothes, my fingers clawing
the jutting spurs of a cliff, when a band of brutes
came at me, ran me through with knives, the fools,

they took me for plunder worth the taking.
The tides hold me now
and the stormwinds roll my body down the shore.
By the sky's lovely light and the buoyant breeze I beg you,
by your father, your hopes for Iulus rising to his prime,
pluck me up from my pain, my undefeated captain!
Or throw some earth on my body—you know you can—
sail back to Velia's port. Or if there's a way and
your goddess mother makes it clear—for not without
the will of the gods, I'm certain, do you strive
to cross these awesome streams and Stygian marsh—
give me your pledge, your hand, in all my torment!
Take me with you over the waves. At least in death
I'll find a peaceful haven.”

So the pilot begged
and so the Sibyl cut him short: “How, Palinurus,
how can you harbor this mad desire of yours?
You think that you, unburied, can lay your eyes
on the Styx's flood, the Furies' ruthless stream,
and approach the banks unsummoned? Hope no more
the gods' decrees can be brushed aside by prayer.
Hold fast to my words and keep them well in mind
to comfort your hard lot. For neighboring people
living in cities near and far, compelled by signs
from the great gods on high, will appease your bones,
will build you a tomb and pay your tomb due rites
and the site will bear the name of Palinurus
now and always.”

That promise lifts his anguish,
drives, for a while, the grief from his sad heart.
He takes delight in the cape that bears his name.

So now they press on with their journey under way
and at last approach the river. But once the ferryman,
still out in the Styx's currents, spied them moving
across the silent grove and turning toward the bank,
he greets them first with a rough abrupt rebuke:
“Stop, whoever you are at our river's edge,
in full armor too! Why have you come? Speak up,
from right where you are, not one step more! This
is the realm of shadows, sleep and drowsy night.

The law forbids me to carry living bodies across
in my Stygian boat. I'd little joy, believe me,
when Hercules came and I sailed the hero over,
or Theseus, Pirithous, sons of gods as they were
with their high and mighty power. Hercules stole
our watchdog—chained him, the poor trembling creature,
dragged him away from our king's very throne! The others
tried to snatch our queen from the bridal bed of Death!”

But Apollo's seer broke in and countered Charon:
“There's no such treachery here—just calm down—
no threat of force in our weapons. The huge guard
at the gates can howl for eternity from his cave,
terrifying the bloodless shades, Persephone keep
her chastity safe at home behind her uncle's doors.
Aeneas of Troy, famous for his devotion, feats of arms,
goes down to the deepest shades of hell to see his father.
But if this image of devotion cannot move you, here,
this bough”—showing the bough enfolded in her robes—
“You know it well.”

At this, the heaving rage
subsides in his chest. The Sibyl says no more.
The ferryman, marveling at the awesome gift,
the fateful branch unseen so many years,
swerves his dusky craft and approaches shore.
The souls already crouched at the long thwarts—
he brusquely thrusts them out, clearing the gangways,
quickly taking massive Aeneas aboard the little skiff.
Under his weight the boat groans and her stitched seams
gape as she ships great pools of water pouring in.
At last, the river crossed, the ferryman lands
the seer and hero all unharmed in the marsh,
the repellent oozing slime and livid sedge.

These
are the realms that monstrous Cerberus rocks with howls
braying out of his three throats, his enormous bulk
squatting low in the cave that faced them there.
The Sibyl, seeing the serpents writhe around his neck,
tossed him a sop, slumbrous with honey and drugged seed,
and he, frothing with hunger, three jaws spread wide,
snapped it up where the Sibyl tossed it—gone.
His tremendous back relaxed, he sags to earth

and sprawls over all his cave, his giant hulk limp.
The watchdog buried now in sleep, Aeneas seizes
the way in, quickly clear of the river's edge,
the point of no return.
At that moment, cries—
they could hear them now, a crescendo of wailing,
ghosts of infants weeping, robbed of their share
of this sweet life, at its very threshold too:
all, snatched from the breast on that black day
that swept them off and drowned them in bitter death.
Beside them were those condemned to die on a false charge.
But not without jury picked by lot, not without judge
are their places handed down. Not at all.
Minos the grand inquisitor stirs the urn,
he summons the silent jury of the dead,
he scans the lives of those accused, their charges.
The region next to them is held by those sad ghosts,
innocents all, who brought on death by their own hands;
despising the light, they threw their lives away.
How they would yearn, now, in the world above
to endure grim want and long hard labor!
But Fate bars the way. The grisly swamp
and its loveless, lethal waters bind them fast,
Styx with its nine huge coils holds them captive.

Close to the spot, extending toward the horizon—
the Sibyl points them out—are the Fields of Mourning,
that is the name they bear. Here wait those souls
consumed by the harsh, wasting sickness, cruel love,
concealed on lonely paths, shrouded by myrtle bowers.
Not even in death do their torments leave them, ever.
Here he glimpses Phaedra, Procris, and Eriphyle grieving,
baring the wounds her heartless son had dealt her.
Evadne, Pasiphaë, and Laodamia walking side by side,
and another, a young man once, a woman now, Caeneus,
turned back by Fate to the form she bore at first.

And wandering there among them, wound still fresh,
Phoenician Dido drifted along the endless woods.
As the Trojan hero paused beside her, recognized her
through the shadows, a dim, misty figure—as one
when the month is young may see or seem to see
the new moon rising up through banks of clouds—

that moment Aeneas wept and approached the ghost
with tender words of love: “Tragic Dido,
so, was the story true that came my way?
I heard that you were dead . . .
you took the final measure with a sword.
Oh, dear god, was it I who caused your death?
I swear by the stars, by the Powers on high, whatever
faith one swears by here in the depths of earth,
I left your shores, my Queen, against my will. Yes,
the will of the gods, that drives me through the shadows now,
these moldering places so forlorn, this deep unfathomed night—
their decrees have forced me on. Nor did I ever dream
my leaving could have brought you so much grief.
Stay a moment. Don’t withdraw from my sight.
Running away—from whom? This is the last word
that Fate allows me to say to you. The last.”

Aeneas, with such appeals, with welling tears,
tried to soothe her rage, her wild fiery glance.
But she, her eyes fixed on the ground, turned away,
her features no more moved by his pleas as he talked on
than if she were set in stony flint or Parian marble rock.
And at last she tears herself away, his enemy forever,
fleeing back to the shadowed forests where Sychaeus,
her husband long ago, answers all her anguish,
meets her love with love. But Aeneas, no less
struck by her unjust fate, escorts her from afar
with streaming tears and pities her as she passes.

From there they labor along the charted path
and at last they gain the utmost outer fields
where throngs of the great war heroes live apart.
Here Tydeus comes to meet him, Parthenopaeus
shining in arms, and Adrastus’ pallid phantom. Here,
mourned in the world above and fallen dead in battle,
sons of Dardanus, chiefs arrayed in a long ranked line.
Seeing them all, he groaned—Glaucus, Medon, Thersilochus,
Antenor’s three sons and the priest of Ceres, Polyboetes,
Idaeus too, still with chariot, still with gear in hand.
Their spirits crowding around Aeneas, left and right,

beg him to linger longer—a glimpse is not enough—
to walk beside him and learn the reasons why he's come.
But the Greek commanders and Agamemnon's troops in phalanx,
spotting the hero and his armor glinting through the shadows—
blinding panic grips them, some turn tail and run
as they once ran back to the ships, some strain
to raise a battle cry, a thin wisp of a cry
that mocks their gaping jaws.

And here he sees Deiphobus too, Priam's son
mutilated, his whole body, his face hacked to pieces—
Ah, so cruel—his face and both his hands, and his ears
ripped from his ravaged head, his nostrils slashed,
disgraceful wound. He can hardly recognize him,
a cowering shadow hiding his punishments so raw.
Aeneas, never pausing, hails the ghost at once
in an old familiar voice: "Mighty captain,
Deiphobus, sprung of the noble blood of Teucer,
who was bent on making you pay a price so harsh?
Who could maim you so? I heard on that last night
that you, exhausted from killing hordes of Greeks,
had fallen dead on a mangled pile of carnage.
So I was the one who raised your empty tomb
on Rhoeteum Cape and called out to your shade
three times with a ringing voice. Your name and armor
mark the site, my friend, but I could not find you,
could not bury your bones in native soil
when I set out to sea."

"Nothing, my friend," Priam's son replies,
"you have left nothing undone. All that's owed
Deiphobus and his shadow you have paid in full.
My own fate and the deadly crimes of that Spartan whore
have plunged me in this hell. Look at the souvenirs she left me!
And how we spent that last night, lost in deluded joys,
you know. Remember it we must, and all too well.
When the fatal horse mounted over our steep walls,
its weighted belly teeming with infantry in arms—
she led the Phrygian women round the city, feigning
the orgiastic rites of Bacchus, dancing, shrieking

but in their midst she shook her monstrous torch,
a flare from the city heights, a signal to the Greeks.
While I in our cursed bridal chamber, there I lay,
bone-weary with anguish, buried deep in sleep,
peaceful, sweet, like the peace of death itself.
And all the while that matchless wife of mine
is removing all my weapons from the house,
even slipping my trusty sword from under my pillow.
She calls Menelaus in and flings the doors wide open,
hoping no doubt by this grand gift to him, her lover,
to wipe the slate clean of her former wicked ways.
Why drag things out? They burst into the bedroom,
Ulysses, that rouser of outrage right beside them,
Aeolus' crafty heir. You gods, if my lips are pure,
I pray for vengeance now—
deal such blows to the Greeks as they dealt *me!*
But come, tell me in turn what twist of fate
has brought you here alive? Forced by wanderings,
storm-tossed at sea, or prompted by the gods?
What destiny hounds you on to visit these,
these sunless homes of sorrow, harrowed lands?"

Trading words, as Dawn in her rose-red chariot
crossed in mid-career, high noon in the arching sky,
and they might have spent what time they had with tales
if the Sibyl next to Aeneas had not warned him tersely:
"Night comes on, Aeneas. We waste our time with tears.
This is the place where the road divides in two.
To the right it runs below the mighty walls of Death,
our path to Elysium, but the left-hand road torments
the wicked, leading down to Tartarus, path to doom."

"No anger, please, great priestess," begged Deiphobus.
"Back I go to the shades to fill the tally out.
Now go, our glory of Troy, go forth and enjoy
a better fate than mine." With his last words
he turned in his tracks and went his way.

Aeneas
suddenly glances back and beneath a cliff to the left
he sees an enormous fortress ringed with triple walls
and raging around it all, a blazing flood of lava,

Tartarus' River of Fire, whirling thunderous boulders.
Before it rears a giant gate, its columns solid adamant,
so no power of man, not even the gods themselves
can root it out in war. An iron tower looms on high
where Tisiphone, crouching with bloody shroud girt up,
never sleeping, keeps her watch at the entrance night and day.
Groans resound from the depths, the savage crack of the lash,
the grating creak of iron, the clank of dragging chains.
And Aeneas froze there, terrified, taking in the din:
"What are the crimes, what kinds? Tell me, Sibyl,
what are the punishments, why this scourging?
Why such wailing echoing in the air?"

The seer rose to the moment: "Famous captain of Troy,
no pure soul may set foot on that wicked threshold.
But when Hecate put me in charge of Avernus' groves
she taught me all the punishments of the gods,
she led me through them all.
Here Cretan Rhadamanthus rules with an iron hand,
censuring men, exposing fraud, forcing confessions
when anyone up above, reveling in his hidden crimes,
puts off his day of atonement till he dies, the fool,
too late. That very moment, vengeful Tisiphone, armed
with lashes, springs on the guilty, whips them till they quail,
with her left hand shaking all her twisting serpents,
summoning up her savage sisters, bands of Furies.
Then at last, screeching out on their grinding hinge
the infernal gates swing wide.
"Can you see that sentry
crouched at the entrance? What a specter guards the threshold!
Fiercer still, the monstrous Hydra, fifty black maws gaping,
holds its lair inside.
"Then the abyss, Tartarus itself
plunges headlong down through the darkness twice as far
as our gaze goes up to Olympus rising toward the skies.
Here the ancient line of the Earth, the Titans' spawn,
flung down by lightning, writhe in the deep pit.
There I saw the twin sons of Aloeus too, giant bodies
that clawed the soaring sky with their hands to tear it down
and thrust great Jove from his kingdom high above.

“I saw Salmoneus too, who paid a brutal price
for aping the flames of Jove and Olympus’ thunder.
Sped by his four-horse chariot, flaunting torches,
right through the Greek tribes and Elis city’s heart
he rode in triumph, claiming as *his* the honors of the gods.
The madman, trying to match the storm and matchless lightning
just by stamping on bronze with prancing horn-hoofed steeds!
The almighty Father hurled his bolt through the thunderheads—
no torches for him, no smoky flicker of pitch-pines, no,
he spun him headlong down in a raging whirlwind.

“Tityus too:

you could see that son of Earth, the mother of us all,
his giant body splayed out over nine whole acres,
a hideous vulture with hooked beak gorging down
his immortal liver and innards ever ripe for torture.
Deep in his chest it nestles, ripping into its feast
and the fibers, grown afresh, get no relief from pain.

“What need to tell of the Lapiths, Ixion, or Pirithous?
Above them a black rock—now, now slipping, teetering,
watch, forever about to fall. While the golden posts
of high festal couches gleam, and a banquet spreads
before their eyes with luxury fit for kings . . .
but reclining just beside them, the oldest Fury
holds back their hands from even touching the food,
surging up with her brandished torch and deafening screams.

“Here those who hated their brothers, while alive,
or struck their fathers down
or embroiled clients in fraud, or brooded alone
over troves of gold they gained and never put aside
some share for their own kin—a great multitude, these—
then those killed for adultery, those who marched to the flag
of civil war and never shrank from breaking their pledge
to their lords and masters: all of them, walled up here,
wait to meet their doom.

“Don’t hunger to know their doom,
what form of torture or twist of Fortune drags them down.
Some trundle enormous boulders, others dangle, racked
to the breaking point on the spokes of rolling wheels.
Doomed Theseus sits on his seat and there he will sit forever.

Phlegyas, most in agony, sounds out his warning to all,
his piercing cries bear witness through the darkness:
'Learn to bow to justice. Never scorn the gods.
You all stand forewarned!'

"Here's one who bartered his native land for gold,
he saddled her with a tyrant, set up laws for a bribe,
for a bribe he struck them down. This one forced himself
on his daughter's bed and sealed a forbidden marriage.
All dared an outrageous crime and what they dared, they did.

"No, not if I had a hundred tongues and a hundred mouths
and a voice of iron too—I could never capture
all the crimes or run through all the torments,
doom by doom."

So Apollo's aged priestess
ended her answer, then she added: "Come,
press on with your journey. See it through,
this duty you've undertaken. We must hurry now.
I can just make out the ramparts forged by the Cyclops.
There are the gates, facing us with their arch.
There our orders say to place our gifts."

At that,
both of them march in step along the shadowed paths,
consuming the space between, and approach the doors.
Aeneas springs to the entryway and rinsing his limbs
with fresh pure water, there at the threshold,
just before them, stakes the golden bough.

The rite complete at last,
their duty to the goddess performed in full,
they gained the land of joy, the fresh green fields,
the Fortunate Groves where the blessed make their homes.
Here a freer air, a dazzling radiance clothes the fields
and the spirits possess their own sun, their own stars.
Some flex their limbs in the grassy wrestling-rings,
contending in sport, they grapple on the golden sands.
Some beat out a dance with their feet and chant their songs.
And Orpheus himself, the Thracian priest with his long robes,

keeps their rhythm strong with his lyre's seven ringing strings,
plucking now with his fingers, now with his ivory plectrum.
Here is the ancient line of Teucer, noblest stock of all,
those great-hearted heroic sons born in better years,
Ilus, and Assaracus, and Dardanus, founder of Troy.
Far off, Aeneas gazes in awe—their arms, their chariots,
phantoms all, their lances fixed in the ground, their horses,
freed from harness, grazing the grasslands near and far.
The same joy they took in arms and chariots when alive,
in currying horses sleek and putting them to pasture,
follows them now they rest beneath the earth.
Others, look,
he glimpses left and right in the meadows, feasting,
singing in joy a chorus raised to Healing Apollo,
deep in a redolent laurel grove where Eridanus River
rushes up, in full spate, and rolls through woods
in the high world above. And here are troops of men
who had suffered wounds, fighting to save their country,
and those who had been pure priests while still alive,
and the faithful poets whose songs were fit for Phoebus;
those who enriched our lives with the newfound arts they forged
and those we remember well for the good they did mankind.
And all, with snow-white headbands crowning their brows,
flow around the Sibyl as she addresses them there,
Musaeus first, who holds the center of that huge throng,
his shoulders rearing high as they gaze up toward him:
“Tell us, happy spirits, and you, the best of poets,
what part of your world, what region holds Anchises?
All for him we have come,
we've sailed across the mighty streams of hell.”

And at once the great soul made a brief reply:
“No one's home is fixed. We live in shady groves,
we settle on pillowed banks and meadows washed with brooks.
But you, if your heart compels you, climb this ridge
and I soon will set your steps on an easy path.”

So he said and walking on ahead, from high above
points out to them open country swept with light.
Down they come and leave the heights behind.

Now father Anchises, deep in a valley's green recess,

was passing among the souls secluded there, reviewing them, eagerly, on their way to the world of light above. By chance he was counting over his own people, all his cherished heirs, their fame and their fates, their values, acts of valor. When he saw Aeneas striding toward him over the fields, he reached out both his hands as his spirit lifted, tears ran down his cheeks, a cry broke from his lips: “You’ve come at last? Has the love your father hoped for mastered the hardship of the journey? Let me look at your face, my son, exchange some words, and hear your familiar voice. So I dreamed, I knew you’d come, I counted the moments—my longing has not betrayed me. Over what lands, what seas have you been driven, buffeted by what perils into my open arms, my son? How I feared the realm of Libya might well do you harm!”

“Your ghost, my father,” he replied, “your grieving ghost, so often it came and urged me to your threshold! My ships are lying moored in the Tuscan sea. Let me clasp your hand, my father, let me— I beg you, don’t withdraw from my embrace!”

So Aeneas pleaded, his face streaming tears. Three times he tried to fling his arms around his neck, three times he embraced—nothing . . . the phantom sifting through his fingers, light as wind, quick as a dream in flight.

And now Aeneas sees in the valley’s depths a sheltered grove and rustling wooded brakes and the Lethe flowing past the homes of peace. Around it hovered numberless races, nations of souls like bees in meadowlands on a cloudless summer day that settle on flowers, riots of color, swarming round the lilies’ lustrous sheen, and the whole field comes alive with a humming murmur. Struck by the sudden sight, Aeneas, all unknowing, wonders aloud, and asks: “What is the river over there? And who are they who crowd the banks in such a growing throng?”

His father Anchises answers: “They are the spirits
owed a second body by the Fates. They drink deep
of the river Lethe’s currents there, long drafts
that will set them free of cares, oblivious forever.
How long I have yearned to tell you, show them to you,
face-to-face, yes, as I count the tally out
of all my children’s children. So all the more
you can rejoice with me in Italy, found at last.”

“What, Father, can we suppose that any spirits
rise from here to the world above, return once more
to the shackles of the body? Why this mad desire,
poor souls, for the light of life?”

“I will tell you,
my son, not keep you in suspense,” Anchises says,
and unfolds all things in order, one by one.

“First,
the sky and the earth and the flowing fields of the sea,
the shining orb of the moon and the Titan sun, the stars:
an inner spirit feeds them, coursing through all their limbs,
mind stirs the mass and their fusion brings the world to birth.
From their union springs the human race and the wild beasts,
the winged lives of birds and the wondrous monsters bred
below the glistening surface of the sea. The seeds of life—
fiery is their force, divine their birth, but they
are weighed down by the bodies’ ills or dulled
by earthly limbs and flesh that’s born for death.
That is the source of all men’s fears and longings,
joys and sorrows, nor can they see the heavens’ light,
shut up in the body’s tomb, a prison dark and deep.

“True,
but even on that last day, when the light of life departs,
the wretches are not completely purged of all the taints,
nor are they wholly freed of all the body’s plagues.
Down deep they harden fast—they must, so long engrained
in the flesh—in strange, uncanny ways. And so the souls
are drilled in punishments, they must pay for their old offenses.
Some are hung splayed out, exposed to the empty winds,
some are plunged in the rushing floods—their stains,
their crimes scoured off or scorched away by fire.
Each of us must suffer his own demanding ghost.

Then we are sent to Elysium's broad expanse,
a few of us even hold these fields of joy
till the long days, a cycle of time seen through,
cleanse our hard, inveterate stains and leave us clear
ethereal sense, the eternal breath of fire purged and pure.
But all the rest, once they have turned the wheel of time
for a thousand years: God calls them forth to the Lethe,
great armies of souls, their memories blank so that
they may revisit the overarching world once more
and begin to long to return to bodies yet again."

Anchises, silent a moment, drawing his son and Sibyl
with him into the midst of the vast murmuring throng,
took his stand on a rise of ground where he could scan
the long column marching toward him, soul by soul,
and recognize their features as they neared.

"So come,
the glory that will follow the sons of Troy through time,
your children born of Italian stock who wait for life,
bright souls, future heirs of our name and our renown:
I will reveal them all and tell you of your fate.

"There,
you see that youth who leans on a tipless spear of honor?
Assigned the nearest place to the world of light,
the first to rise to the air above, his blood
mixed with Italian blood, he bears an Alban name.
Silvius, your son, your last-born, when late
in your old age your wife Lavinia brings him up,
deep in the woods—a king who fathers kings in turn,
he founds our race that rules in Alba Longa.

"Nearby,
there's Procas, pride of the Trojan people, then come
Capys, Numitor, and the one who revives your name,
Silvius Aeneas, your equal in arms and duty,
famed, if he ever comes to rule the Alban throne.
What brave young men! Look at the power they display
and the oakleaf civic crowns that shade their foreheads.
They will erect for you Nomentum, Gabii, Fidena town
and build Collatia's ramparts on the mountains,
Pometia too, and Inuis' fortress, Bola and Cora.
Famous names in the future, nameless places now.

"Here,

a son of Mars, his grandsire Numitor's comrade—Romulus,
bred from Assaracus' blood by his mother, Ilia.

See how the twin plumes stand joined on his helmet?
And the Father of Gods himself already marks him out
with his own bolts of honor. Under his auspices, watch,
my son, our brilliant Rome will extend her empire far
and wide as the earth, her spirit high as Olympus.

Within her single wall she will gird her seven hills,
blest in her breed of men: like the Berecynthian Mother
crowned with her turrets, riding her victor's chariot
through the Phrygian cities, glad in her brood of gods,
embracing a hundred grandsons. All dwell in the heavens,
all command the heights.

“Now turn your eyes this way
and behold these people, your own Roman people.
Here is Caesar and all the line of Iulus
soon to venture under the sky's great arch.
Here is the man, he's here! Time and again
you've heard his coming promised—Caesar Augustus!

Son of a god, he will bring back the Age of Gold
to the Latian fields where Saturn once held sway,
expand his empire past the Garamants and the Indians
to a land beyond the stars, beyond the wheel of the year,
the course of the sun itself, where Atlas bears the skies
and turns on his shoulder the heavens studded with flaming stars.
Even now the Caspian and Maeotic kingdoms quake at his coming,
oracles sound the alarm and the seven mouths of the Nile
churn with fear. Not even Hercules himself could cross
such a vast expanse of earth, though it's true he shot
the stag with its brazen hoofs, and brought peace
to the ravaged woods of Erymanthus, terrorized
the Hydra of Lerna with his bow. Not even Bacchus
in all his glory, driving his team with vines for reins
and lashing his tigers down from Nysa's soaring ridge.
Do we still flinch from turning our valor into deeds?
Or fear to make our home on Western soil?

“But look,
who is that over there, crowned with an olive wreath
and bearing sacred emblems? I know his snowy hair,
his beard—the first king to found our Rome on laws,
Numa, sent from the poor town of Cures, paltry land,
to wield imperial power.

“And after him comes Tullus

disrupting his country's peace to rouse a stagnant people,
armies stale to the taste of triumph, back to war again.

And just behind him, Ancus, full of the old bravado,
even now too swayed by the breeze of public favor.

"Wait,
would you like to see the Tarquin kings, the overweening
spirit of Brutus the Avenger, the fasces he reclaims?
The first to hold a consul's power and ruthless axes,
then, when his sons foment rebellion against the city,
their father summons them to the executioner's block
in freedom's noble name, unfortunate man . . .

however the future years will exalt his actions:
a patriot's love wins out, and boundless lust for praise.

"Now,
the Decii and the Drusi—look over there—Torquatus too,
with his savage axe, Camillus bringing home the standards.
But you see that pair of spirits? Gleaming in equal armor,
equals now at peace, while darkness pins them down,
but if they should reach the light of life, what war
they'll rouse between them! Battles, massacres—Caesar,
the bride's father, marching down from his Alpine ramparts,
Fortress Monaco, Pompey her husband set to oppose him
with the armies of the East.

"No, my sons, never inure
yourselves to civil war, never turn your sturdy power
against your country's heart. You, Caesar, you
be first in mercy—you trace your line from Olympus—
born of my blood, throw down your weapons now!

"Mummius her
he will conquer Corinth and, famed for killing Achaeans,
drive his victor's chariot up the Capitol's heights.
And there is Paullus, and he will rout all Argos
and Agamemnon's own Mycenae and cut Perseus down—
the heir of Aeacus, born of Achilles' warrior blood—
and avenge his Trojan kin and Minerva's violated shrine.

"Who,
noble Cato, could pass you by in silence? Or you, Cossus?
Or the Gracchi and their kin? Or the two Scipios,
both thunderbolts of battle, Libya's scourge?
Or you, Fabricius, reared from poverty into power?
Or you, Serranus the Sower, seeding your furrow?
You Fabii, where do you rush me, all but spent?
And you, famous Maximus, you are the one man

whose delaying tactics save our Roman state.

“Others, I have no doubt,
will forge the bronze to breathe with suppler lines,
draw from the block of marble features quick with life,
plead their cases better, chart with their rods the stars
that climb the sky and foretell the times they rise.
But you, Roman, remember, rule with all your power
the peoples of the earth—these will be your arts:
to put your stamp on the works and ways of peace,
to spare the defeated, break the proud in war.”

They were struck with awe as father Anchises paused,
then carried on: “Look there, Marcellus marching toward us,
decked in splendid plunder he tore from a chief he killed,
victorious, towering over all. This man on horseback,
he will steady the Roman state when rocked by chaos,
mow the Carthaginians down in droves, the rebel Gauls.
He is only the third to offer up to Father Quirinus
the enemy’s captured arms.”

Aeneas broke in now,
for he saw a young man walking at Marcellus’ side,
handsome, striking, his armor burnished bright
but his face showed little joy, his eyes cast down.
“Who is that, Father, matching Marcellus stride for stride?
A son, or one of his son’s descendants born of noble stock?
What acclaim from his comrades! What fine bearing,
the man himself! True, but around his head
a mournful shadow flutters black as night.”

“My son,”
his tears brimming, father Anchises started in,
“don’t press to know your people’s awesome grief.
Only a glimpse of him the Fates will grant the world,
not let him linger longer. Too mighty, the Roman race,
it seemed to You above, if this grand gift should last.
Now what wails of men will the Field of Mars send up
to Mars’ tremendous city! What a cortege you’ll see,
old Tiber, flowing past the massive tomb just built!
No child of Troy will ever raise so high the hopes
of his Latin forebears, nor will the land of Romulus take
such pride in a son she’s borne. Mourn for his virtue!

Mourn for his honor forged of old, his sword arm
never conquered in battle. No enemy could ever
go against him in arms and leave unscathed,
whether he fought on foot or rode on horseback,
digging spurs in his charger's lathered flanks.
Oh, child of heartbreak! If only you could burst
the stern decrees of Fate! You will be Marcellus.
Fill my arms with lilies, let me scatter flowers,
lustrous roses—piling high these gifts, at least,
on our descendant's shade—and perform a futile rite.”

So they wander over the endless fields of air,
gazing at every region, viewing realm by realm.
Once Anchises has led his son through each new scene
and fired his soul with a love of glory still to come,
he tells him next of the wars Aeneas still must wage,
he tells of Laurentine peoples, tells of Latinus' city,
and how he should shun or shoulder each ordeal
that he must meet.

There are twin Gates of Sleep.

One, they say, is called the Gate of Horn
and it offers easy passage to all true shades.

The other glistens with ivory, radiant, flawless,
but through it the dead send false dreams up toward the sky.

And here Anchises, his vision told in full, escorts
his son and Sibyl both and shows them out now
through the Ivory Gate.

Aeneas cuts his way

to the waiting ships to see his crews again,
then sets a course straight on to Caieta's harbor.

Anchors run from prows, the sterns line the shore.