Advanced Latin

The Aeneid of Publius Vergilius Maro

I. Virgil

A. Publius Vergilius Maro, born 70 BCE and died 19 BCE.

1. The spelling "Virgil" is traditional, but strictly speaking it should be spelled "Vergil".

B. Born in northern Italy at a village called Andes near Mantua.

C. He became a member of the literary circle connected to the court of the emperor Augustus, which was led by Maecenas, a wealthy friend of Augustus.

1. Virgil did not take a role in military or political life at Rome, but was, through his connections with Maecenas and the court of Augustus, in close contact with those who did have such roles.

D. Before he wrote the Aeneid, Virgil had already become a famous poet for his earlier works, the Eclogues and Georgics. These were poems about rural, pastoral and agricultural themes.

E. Virgil began work on the Aeneid around 30 BCE.

1. This poem expresses Rome's greatness and destiny through telling of its legendary origins by Aeneas.

F. The work was complete but unrevised at the time of his death in 19 BCE.

1. He ordered that the manuscript be burned, since he didn't feel that it was worthy of publication in its current, unpolished state. Augustus intervened and rescued the poem from destruction; it was published posthumously.

II. Virgil and Augustus

A. Virgil and his contemporaries had experienced much suffering during the period of civil wars that beset the Roman empire in the decades before Augustus established himself as princeps, the "first citizen" and ruler of Rome, ushering in a long era of relative peace and prosperity.

1. The Fall of the Roman Republic and Beginning of the Reign of the Emperors.

a. Under the Republic, the chief administrative and military position was the consulship. There were two consuls, who served for a year. There were other important executive positions as well. The Senate, composed of men from the leading families of Rome, exercised great power and influence over government policy (domestic and foreign policy, finances, religion), although strictly speaking the Senate had no executive power. By law all ex-consuls became Senators (though in nearly all instances these men would have already been Senators before
being consuls). The founding of the Roman Republic is dated to 509 BCE.

b. In 60 BCE the leading figures of the Roman government, Julius Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus, formed what became known as "the first triumvirate." They agreed to help each other and work together to run Rome as they saw fit.

i. Caesar had military success; Pompey had success in clearing the Mediterranean of threats from pirates; Crassus had put down the slave revolt led by Spartacus and was also extraordinarily wealthy.

c. After Crassus is killed in a campaign against the Parthians, Caesar and Pompey begin to drift apart. Caesar is fighting in Gaul; Pompey is back at Rome, trying to gain allies in the Senate.

d. After Caesar is frustrated in gaining certain favors from the Senate, and wary of the growing influence of Pompey, he decides to force the issue, and leads his army into Italy (49 BCE). The result is civil war: Caesar vs. Pompey.

e. Caesar and his allies defeat Pompey and his allies; Caesar declares himself Dictator; he is assassinated in 44 BCE by men who think that Caesar is trying to destroy the republic and set himself up as king.

f. In 43 BCE the second triumvirate is formed by the leaders who were allies of Caesar: Caesar's adopted son, Octavian; Marc Antony (Marcus Antonius); Marcus Aemilius Lepidus. They pursue and defeat the killers of Caesar.

g. Octavian gains control in Rome at the expense of Lepidus; Marc Antony moves to the East to Egypt and his mistress Cleopatra (though he was married to Octavian's sister).

h. Antony divorces Octavian's sister and marries Cleopatra, declaring that her son (by him) will rule the eastern provinces of Rome. Octavian declares war on Antony and Cleopatra.

i. In 31 BCE a decisive naval battle occurs at Actium (near present-day Albania), where Antony and Cleopatra are defeated by Octavian; Antony commits suicide not long afterwards, and Octavian unites the empire under his control.

j. Octavian keeps the structure of the old Republic, but it is now a republic in name only. He does not take the title of dictator or king or emperor, though in essence that is what he is; he is the first emperor of the empire. The Senate bestows on him the honorary name "Augustus".

k. With the end of the civil wars, the grateful citizens look on Augustus as a bringer of peace, a restorer of old-fashioned morality and religion, and protector of the Roman empire.

i. Augustus himself strives to promote this view through his support of poets like Virgil and other artists.
III. The *Aeneid*: Epic Poem.

A. The *Aeneid* is an epic poem in twelve books.

B. It is written in Latin.

C. It is written in **dactylic hexameter**, the meter of epic poetry.
   1. This is the same metrical system as Hesiod's *Theogony* and Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

D. The legend of the founding of Rome.
   1. Like other authors we have read, Virgil takes traditional material (the myths) and manipulates and transforms it to further his own agenda.
      a. In this poem, that agenda includes the glorification of Augustus and his rule.
   2. The myth of Aeneas and his escape from Troy was an old one, with several variants (much as we have seen with so many of the stories).
      a. For example, Aeneas is mentioned several times by Homer in the *Iliad*.
   3. The family tree of Aeneas is long; it gives him connections to Priam and Hector as well as to Jupiter.
      b. From Dardanus: Erichthonius -- Tros -- Assaracus; Ilus; Ganymede.
         i. From Ilus: Laomedon -- Priam -- Hector; Alexander (Paris), etc.
         ii. From Assaracus: Capys -- Anchises -- Aeneas
         iii. The mother of Aeneas is Venus.
     c. The "Julii", the family of Julius Caesar (and hence, Augustus), traced their line back to Aeneas through his son Ascanius, also known as *Iulus*.
        i. (In Latin the letter "i" also stood for "j", which developed later.)

E. The *Aeneid* and its predecessors.

1. Virgil was able to make use of the full range of Greek myths, as well as native Italian myths, in working up his epic. The most important models for his work were Homer's epics, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

2. The first half of the *Aeneid* is a reflection of the *Odyssey*, and the second half a reflection of the *Iliad*.
   a. Consider the opening words of the poem: "Arma virumque cano" (Arms and a man I sing...)
i. The first word of the *Iliad* is "Wrath" (the wrath of Achilles); this corresponds to "arma", and signals the topic of the war in Italy which happens in the second half of the *Aeneid*.

ii. The first word of the *Odyssey* is "Man" (Odysseus); this corresponds to "virum" (man), and signals the topic of the wanderings of Aeneas which happens in the first half of the *Aeneid*.

b. It is interesting to try to find the many parallels between the *Aeneid* and Homer's two epics.

i. It is important to note, too, that Virgil is not only imitating Homer, he is also competing with him.

IV. General Outline

A. Book One.

1. The Trojans are leaving Sicily on their way to Italy proper; Juno raises a storm against the Trojan fleet and the ships are scattered, making landfall near Carthage in northern Africa; there they are received with hospitality by the queen Dido. Through the scheming of Venus, Dido falls in love with Aeneas at the banquet she holds in his honor; at the banquet she asks that he tell of his journey.

B. Book Two.

1. A flash-back wherein Aeneas tells the story of the Trojan Horse and destruction of Troy, including his brave fight against the invading Greeks, the death of king Priam, the death of his wife Creusa, and the various divine signs he receives urging him to leave the devastated Troy and venture forth to found a new city.

C. Book Three.

1. A continuation of the flash-back narrative of Aeneas; he describes the wanderings of the Trojan refugees, their various (unsuccessful) attempts to find exactly where they should start their new city, and the continuation of various divine signs and prophecies that urge them onwards towards Italy. They reach Sicily, and Anchises dies.

D. Book Four.

1. The tragic story of Dido's love for Aeneas; she ignores divine signs that indicate that this love of hers is wrong, and pursues Aeneas; work on the new city of Carthage comes to a halt; Aeneas is warned by Mercury, who is bringing the word of Jupiter, to leave Carthage and get on with his mission to Italy; Aeneas is confronted by Dido as he tries to leave quietly and she exorcises him; Aeneas and his group leave Carthage; Dido kills herself.

E. Book Five.

1. The Trojans reach Sicily again; they celebrate funeral games in honor of Anchises who had died there one year ago; during the games the Trojan women, spurred on by Juno, set fire to the ships; the fires are extinguished when Jupiter sends a rainstorm at the request of Aeneas; Aeneas leaves behind some Trojans who do wish to stay and establishes a new city for them there; he and the rest of the Trojans sail onwards to Italy.
V. Some Important Points to Consider:

A. What are the parallels between Virgil's epic and Homer's epics?
   1. Consider especially the Odyssey in relation to the first six books of the Aeneid.
   2. Also, what are the significant differences?

B. How is the hero Aeneas different from the heroes of Homer's epics?

C. Why is Virgil trying to discredit the Greeks (and Ulysses/Odysseus in particular)?

D. How is Virgil manipulating the stories to promote a vision of Rome's (and Augustus') greatness?
   1. How does this theme relate to the problems of human suffering (e.g., the Dido episode) which result from the enactment of this "destined" greatness?
      a. It appears that both Dido and Aeneas suffer (and others, as well, in other episodes).
         i. See question "B" above, re. the Virgilian "hero" Aeneas.

E. How are we to understand the Dido episode? What do you think of Aeneas' actions? How responsible is Dido herself for what happens?
   1. How similar is this episode to Greek tragedy?
      a. Some scholars view the structure of the Aeneid as tripartite: first, the tragedy of Dido; second, the Roman center; third, the tragedy of Turnus. Do you agree with this division?

F. Consider the role of the gods and fate.
   1. Are the gods (and fate) working to benefit mankind?
      a. Consider question "D" above in this regard.

I. The Aeneid

A. General Outline, Books 6-12.
   1. Book 6
      a. As per the instructions of Helenus (Book 3), Aeneas proceeds to Cumae in Italy to consult the Sibyl, the prophetess who leads him into the Underworld. In the Underworld he sees many sights and souls (including Dido); he finally meets with his father, Anchises, who shows Aeneas the future leaders and heroes of Rome (including Augustus). Aeneas returns to the world of the living through the gate of ivory (the gate of false dreams).

   2. Book 7
      a. Virgil makes a new invocation of the Muses, seeking assistance with the second half of the poem, which he says is "a greater history" and "a greater task." Aeneas and his fleet reach the Tiber river, and are welcomed by king Latinus, who has received clear divine signs that his daughter, Lavinia, must marry a foreigner; Latinus takes this to be
Aeneas. The Trojans begin to establish a camp at the riverside. Juno rouses a Fury, Allecto, from the Underworld to subvert the happy "homecoming" of the Trojans. Allecto turns Latinus' wife Amata against Aeneas in favor of Turnus, leader of the neighboring Rutulians; Allecto stirs Turnus to foment war against the Trojans as "invaders"; Allecto brings about the occasion for conflict by arranging for young Ascanius to wound the pet stag of Silvia, daughter of the king's chief herdsman, Tyrhenus. Book 7 ends with a catalogue (epic feature) of the Italian forces rallying to assist Turnus.

3. Book 8
   a. Aeneas, advised by the river god of the Tiber, seeks allies for the forthcoming battle; he travels up the river to see king Evander, who lives at Pallentum, the future site of the city of Rome. Evander sends his son Pallas along with a large force of Arcadians to assist Aeneas. Venus has her husband Vulcan create new armor and a new shield for Aeneas; the shield has designs depicting major events from Roman history (which Aeneas marvels at but does not understand), including the battle of Actium (31 BCE) when Octavian/Augustus defeated the combined fleets of Antony and Cleopatra, ensuring himself sole rule of the empire.

4. Book 9
   a. With Aeneas gone, Turnus and his allies press the Trojans hard. A night expedition by the young friends Nisus and Euryalus brings destruction to many sleeping Italians, but ends with the deaths of the two Trojans. The Italians are about to set fire to the Trojan ships, but the goddess Cybele (identified with Rhea) transforms them into nymphs. Turnus himself breaks into the Trojan camp, but he fails to open the gates for the rest of his forces, and finally is forced to retreat via the river Tiber. Ascanius kills a bragart Italian warrior, but is warned by Apollo not to engage in further battles.

5. Book 10
   a. Aeneas is advised by the nymphs, his former ships, as to what is happening at the Trojan encampment; he returns in fury with Pallas and many Italians are killed. Turnus seeks out Pallas and kills him, glorying in this slaughter and taking Pallas' sword-belt. Aeneas does battle with Mezentius, and when Mezentius' son Lausus steps in to defend his father, Aeneas, without eagerness, kills Lausus (and later, Mezentius).

6. Book 11
   a. Description of the funeral of Pallas; a general truce for the burial of dead on both sides; fighting later resumes. Long focus on the heroic deeds and death of the female Italian warlord Camilla.

7. Book 12
   a. A truce is arranged to allow for single combat between Aeneas and Turnus, but the truce is broken after the intervention of Juno and Turnus' sister, the nymph Juturna, and in the subsequent melee Aeneas is wounded. Back on Olympus Juno finally accepts defeat on condition that the Italians shall be the dominant partners in the Trojan-Italian
II. Some Important Points to Consider:

A. Book 6 marks the end of the _Odyssey_-like first half of the _Aeneid_.
   1. What similarities does it have to Homer's poem?
   2. What are the differences between Aeneas' trip to the Underworld and Odysseus'?
   3. Why does Virgil have Anchises send Aeneas back through the gate of ivory?

B. Book 7 marks a new beginning for Virgil in the _Aeneid_.
   1. What elements here are similar to things you found in Book 1?
   2. Why does Virgil identify what lies before him as "a greater task"? What does this mean?
   3. How do events in the second half of the poem reflect those of Homer's _Iliad_?

C. How is the idea of Fate continued through the second half of the _Aeneid_?
   1. How does this relate to the propaganda and political agenda(s) of the poem?
      a. Consider especially the trip to the Underworld (Book 6) and the shield (Book 8), as well as Jupiter's prophecy (Book 1), and the agreement between Juno and Jupiter in Book 12.

D. Aside from the reason given in the poem about gaining allies for the war, why does Virgil have Aeneas visit Evander in Book 8?

E. What is/are the purpose(s) of the Nisus and Euryalos episode in Book 9?

F. What are we to learn from comparing and contrasting the episodes of the deaths of Pallas and Lausus in Book 10?
   1. Is Aeneas to blame for Pallas' death?

G. Consider the ending of the poem:
   1. How does it differ from the ending of the _Iliad_?
      a. The _Iliad_ does not end with the death of Hector at Achilles' hands. Afterwards, we have a remarkable and touching episode where Priam, guided by Hermes, comes into the Greek camp to the tent of Achilles and asks that Hector's body be returned for proper burial. Achilles, reminded of his own father by the aged Priam, gives up his brutal anger and returns Hector's body.
   2. Should Aeneas have spared Turnus?
3. Why end this epic poem about the greatness of Rome and its legendary foundation with such an episode, i.e., a killing?

H. Is Virgil being subversive in his poem?

1. Is the praise of Augustus and the Roman empire merely superficial, and beneath the surface, when we "read between the lines," is Virgil criticizing Augustus and the imperial Roman state?
   a. What sort of evidence, if any, can we find for such a "subversive" reading of the Aeneid?
   b. How is the Aeneid more than just an exercise in political propaganda? Must it be "subversive" if it is to have any enduring messages for readers like ourselves?

I. Consider the character Aeneas:

1. His epithets are "pious", "dutiful", and "father"; He often acts out of a sense of obligation and in response to signs of destiny (e.g., his abandonment of Dido). But, does he ever do anything of his own accord? What does he do, if anything, for himself? Is he just a sort of "robot" of destiny?
   a. Is Aeneas a fitting role model for Virgil's Roman readers?
      i. Consider, in contrast, Virgil's characterization of Ulysses.

_Prepared by Dan Schoos_