The *Aeneid* is the story of a man who lived three thousand years ago in the city of Troy in the north-west tip of Asia Minor. Troy was besieged and sacked by the Greeks. After a series of disasters Aeneas met and loved a woman, Dido, queen of Carthage, but obeyed the call of duty to his people and his gods and left her to her death. Then, after long years of wandering, he reached Italy, fought a bitter war against the peoples of Latium and in the end formed an alliance with them which enabled him to found his city of Lavinium. From these beginnings, 333 years later, in 753 BC, the city of Rome was founded. The Romans had arrived in Italy.

The *Aeneid* is still read and still resonates because it is a great poem. Part of its relevance to us is that it is the story of a human being who knew defeat and dispossession, love and the loss of love, whose life was ruled by his sense of duty to his gods, his people and his family, particularly to his beloved son Ascanius. But it was a hard duty and he sometimes wearied of it. He knew about war and hated the waste and ugliness of it, but fought, when he had to fight, with hatred and passion. After three millennia, the world is still full of such people. While we are of them and feel for them we shall find something in the *Aeneid*. The gods have changed, but for human beings there is not much difference:

Pitiless Mars was now dealing grief and death to both sides with impartial hand. Victors and vanquished killed and were killed and neither side thought of flight. In the halls of Jupiter the gods pitied the futile anger of the two armies and grieved that men had so much suffering ...

(10.755–759)

But the *Aeneid* is not simply a contemplation of the general human predicament. It is also full of individual human beings behaving as human beings still do. Take the charm and humour of Dido putting the Trojans at their ease at 1.562–578; the grief of Andromache when she meets the Trojan youth who is the same age as her son Astyanax would have been if he had been allowed to live — we do not need to be told that Astyanax is the name on the second altar at 3.305; the cunning of Acestes and Aeneas as they shame the great old champion back into the ring at 5.389–408; the childish joke of Iulus at 7.116 and its momentous interpretation; the aged hero feasting his eyes on his old friend’s son at 8.152 or realizing at 8.560 that he can do nothing now except talk; the native’s abuse of the foreigners from 9.598; the lying harridans at the beginning of Book 10 or the death of Mezentius and his horse from 10.858; the growling of Aeneas and the fussing and fumbling of the doctor as he plies his mute, inglorious art from 12.387.

The *Aeneid* presents a heroic view of the life of man in all its splendour and anguish, but it is also full of just observation of the details of individual behaviour. It is not yet out of date.
The Aeneid In Its Own Time

Virgil was born seventy years before Christ. In 44 BC, after a century of civil war and disorder, Julius Caesar was assassinated by Brutus and Cassius in the name of liberty. His heir was his nineteen-year-old grand-nephew and adopted son, Octavian, astute, ruthless and determined. In 42 BC at Philippi, Brutus and Cassius were defeated and the fortunes of Virgil were at their lowest ebb. His family estates at Mantua were confiscated by the victors to provide land for their soldiers to settle on. But he won the patronage of Maecenas, one of the two chief aides of Octavian, and published his pastoral Eclogues in 37 BC. In 29 BC, after Octavian had made himself master of the known world by defeating Antony and Cleopatra at Actium, Virgil finished what John Dryden called ‘the best poem of the best poet’, the Georgics, on the agriculture of Italy. Throughout the twenties Virgil was at work on his Aeneid, a poem in imitation of Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey and in praise of Augustus, the name Octavian had taken on 16 January 27 BC. Virgil died before finishing it, on his way back from Athens with Augustus in 19 BC. To qualify for membership of the Senate, a Roman had to be extremely wealthy. When Virgil died, he owned property ten times that requirement. He left instructions that the Aeneid was to be burned. These instructions were countermanded by Augustus.

It is therefore clear that Virgil wrote and wrote acceptably in praise of his patron, the ruler of Rome. It would be easy to despise or dislike the poem for that. But wrong, for the following reasons:

(i) Rome had endured a century of violence, discord, corruption and insecurity of life and property. Augustus, after intense effort and suffering, notably in his disastrous campaign in Sicily in 37 BC, by his victory at Actium promised peace, order, prosperity and moral regeneration. He even, according to Suetonius, fostered the talents of his generation in every possible way. It was the promise of a Golden Age, and in this euphoria Virgil and his friend Horace, another client of Maecenas and Augustus, wrote their great patriotic poems. At that time it was not foolish to hope and to believe.

(ii) Although Virgil wrote in praise of Augustus and the ideal of empire, he was no Chauvin. He loved country people and country ways, their traditions and their stubborn independence. He responded to human love, between man and woman, between father and son, between men and their homes (consider only 6.450 ff., 12.435 ff., 10.779 ff.), and he knew that empire had to be bought with the coin of human suffering and deprivation. He also knew the other side — the hard work and danger, the dedication and sacrifice which empire demanded of those who had made it and who maintained it, notably Augustus. Virgil does not solve the problems inherent in all this. He does not even pose them. The Aeneid is a story. But behind that story we have all the issues which would have moved a contemporary Roman, and may still move us.

(iii) Praise is one thing. Flattery is another, and the Aeneid is not flattery. The action of the epic is set a thousand years before Augustus and it praises him in two ways: first, by telling the story of his great ancestor, the first founder of Rome, in such a way as resembles the story of Augustus himself, its third founder. The resemblances are not pointed out. The reader is left to observe and ponder them for himself if he wishes. The second mode of praise is direct allusion to Augustus in prophecies and visions, notably near the beginning and end of the
poem, in the descent of Aeneas to consult his father in the Underworld at the end of Book 6, and on the great shield of Aeneas at the end of Book 8.

The *Aeneid* is, among other things, a search for a vision of peace and order for Rome and for humanity. To see its outlines through the mists of time nothing is more helpful than the family tree of the Julians. Allusions to these names in the *Aeneid* are often to be heard as praise of Augustus, the contemporary Julian.
Background

Paris, son of Priam, king of Troy, judged Venus to be more beautiful than Juno and Pallas Athene, and claimed his reward, Helen, wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta. The Greeks gathered an army and sacked the city of Troy after a ten years’ siege. Aeneas escaped with his father, Anchises, and his son, Ascanius/Iulus. Driven by the jealous hatred of Juno, he wandered across the Mediterranean for six years, trying to found a new city. At the opening of the poem, his father has just died in Sicily and Aeneas is sailing for Italy.

Book I — Storm And Banquet

Juno sends a fearful storm which wrecks the Trojan ships on the coast of Libya, near Carthage. There the Trojans are hospitably received by Dido, queen of Carthage. Venus, mother of Aeneas, anxious for the safety of her son, contrives that Dido should fall in love with him.

Virgil and Homer

The poems which set the benchmark for all future epics were Homer’s Iliad, the story of Achilles at the siege of Troy, and his Odyssey, the story of Odysseus’ wanderings and homecoming from Troy to his native Ithaca. The first words of the Aeneid are ‘I sing of arms and of the man …’ (arma virumque cano). Since the Iliad is the epic of war, and the first word in the Odyssey is ‘man’, Virgil has begun by announcing that he is writing an epic in the Homeric style. The ‘man’ is Aeneas, the legendary first founder of Rome, who escaped from the sack of Troy and wandered the seas for six years looking for a place to found a new city. The ‘arms’ are the battles he fought at the fall of Troy as described in the second book of the Aeneid and also, in the last four books, the war he fought against the Latin peoples as he tried to establish his city in Italy.

Virgil and Augustus

Aeneas was victorious. He founded his city of Lavinium and ruled it for three years. After thirty years his son Ascanius/Iulus, moved from Lavinium to Alba Longa, where the Alban kings ruled for three hundred years, until the birth of Romulus and Remus. It was Romulus, son of the priestess Ilia and Mars, who founded the city of Rome and gave it its name in 753 BC, according to the traditional dating. When Virgil was writing the Aeneid in the twenties BC, Rome was ruled by Augustus, the adopted son of Julius Caesar. The Julian family, therefore, still ruled Rome, and in describing how Aeneas, father of the Julians, suffered in founding his city, Virgil is paying tribute to the contemporary Julian in his palace on the Palatine Hill in Rome.
Aeneas and the Gods

For six years Aeneas and the remnants of his people were driven across the Mediterranean by the anger of the goddess Juno, and yet as early as the tenth line of the poem we learn that Aeneas had done no wrong, but on the contrary was famous for his piety. This introduces the divine machinery which so enriches the poem. At a lowly level it unfolds the comedy of manners of the divine family. But more seriously, it raises insoluble problems about the relationship between man and god, between Juno, queen of the gods, and Jupiter their king, and between ineluctable Fate and the will of omnipotent Jupiter; and, crucially, about the function of the will of human beings whom the gods seem to control and, when they wish, destroy. ‘Can there be so much anger in the hearts of the heavenly gods?’ asks Virgil in the eleventh line of the Aeneid, and the poem is, among other things, a meditation on that problem, which, in one formulation or another, is still with us.

When the narrative begins after a short preamble, the Trojan ships are caught in a storm and driven ashore on the Syrtes. These were sandbanks on the north coast of Africa, east of the new city of Carthage, just founded by Phoenicians who had come from Sidon on the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean. Venus sees this and with tears flooding her eyes pleads with her father, Jupiter, to put an end to her son’s suffering and to honour his promise that Aeneas would live to found the Roman race. Jupiter smiles at his daughter and assures her that his will has not changed. Romulus, son of Ilius (and therefore a Julian), will indeed found the city of Rome and give his name to his people, on whom will be imposed no limits of time or space. And in time to come another Julian will conquer the world and give it peace. Praise of Augustus thus appears in a prophecy of the king of the gods, uttered a millennium before Augustus was born.

Aeneas Meets Dido

Venus descends in disguise, teases her son, wraps him in a mist of invisibility and guides him to Carthage. There he gazes at the new temple of Juno with its representations of the Trojan War including a depiction of himself in the confusion of battle, and weeps to see that all men knew what Troy had suffered. ‘Here too,’ he says, ‘there are tears for suffering and men’s hearts are touched by what man has to bear’ (462) (sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt). Dido then arrives and Aeneas sees the comrades whom he had assumed to be drowned coming to ask her assistance. When she responds graciously, Venus dissolves the cloud in which she has concealed Aeneas, and Dido and Aeneas meet.

The book ends with a description of the banquet which Dido gives in honour of her Trojan guests. But Venus suspects that Juno, the goddess of Carthage, may do her son some mischief while he is in the city. To protect him she decides to make Dido love him and effects this by sending her rascally young son Cupid to drive her insane with love. As the men drink their wine, the doomed queen begs Aeneas to tell the story of the fall and sack of his city.

The Aeneid and Carthage

The Aeneid tells the tale of a legendary hero, but it also casts a long shadow over a thousand years of Roman history. Rome’s greatest danger had been the three Punic Wars
fought against Carthage from 264 to 146 BC, in the second of which Hannibal had destroyed Roman armies and overrun the Italian peninsula. The end came in 146 BC when Carthage was razed to the ground and ploughed with salt. The first and fourth books of the Aeneid contain pre-echoes of that traumatic conflict. We sense the dramatic irony as Aeneas describes in such detail the building of Carthage — ‘Their walls are already rising!’ he says enviously (437). We know that his Romans were to destroy them. When Aeneas offers Dido his heartfelt gratitude and promises that she will be praised for all time in every land to which he is called, we know that his descendants will destroy, not praise, her descendants. When she prays that her people should always remember the day of the banquet, we know how they will remember it, and as she invokes kindly Juno, the goddess of marriage and of Carthage, we know that the goddess of Carthage will use a false marriage to destroy its queen.

Book 2 — The Fall Of Troy

This book takes the form of a flashback, as Aeneas tells the banqueters the story of the fall of Troy. The Greeks had erected a huge wooden horse and persuaded the Trojans to drag it into the city. In the dead of night Greek soldiers pour from the horse and open the gates to their comrades. The Trojans put up a fierce but hopeless resistance, and Aeneas escapes from the city with his father and his son.

The Deception of the Trojans

After ten years of hard fighting around Troy, the Greeks act as though they are giving up the siege. They build a huge wooden horse outside the walls, fill it with their best soldiers and sail away, pretending that it is an offering for their safe return to Greece. But they go only as far as the offshore island of Tenedos and leave Sinon behind to persuade the Trojans to take the horse into the city. Laocoön, the priest of Neptune, warns the Trojans not to trust the Greeks. ‘I am afraid of Greeks,’ he says, ‘even when they bear gifts’ (49). But Sinon appears and the Trojans are persuaded. This speech of Sinon is at once an exposé [uncovering] of the decadence of contemporary Greeks in Roman eyes, and a satire on the corruption of ancient rhetoric, a satire sharpened by several interjections by a naïve and gullible audience. (The nearest thing in English is Antony’s funeral oration in Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar with the inane interjections of the crowd.) Once again Laocoön protests, but the gods are against the Trojans. Two serpents come out of the sea and kill the priest of Neptune and his two sons. The Trojans breach their walls and drag in the horse.

The Courage of Aeneas

In all of this book Virgil has a difficulty. His hero is the leading Trojan warrior and he has survived the sack of his city. Since Aeneas himself is speaking, he cannot blatantly advertise his own courage, but at every point in his speech Virgil is careful to give him words which leave no possibility that he could be thought guilty of cowardice or even of misjudgement. The first example of this is that Aeneas is not said to be one of the Trojans who ignored the warnings of Laocoön or were duped by Sinon. He does not enter the stage until a third of the way through the book, when Hector, appearing to him as he sleeps, tells him that Troy is doomed and orders him, as only Hector could, to abandon Troy and carry its gods to a new city across the sea.
Ignoring these orders, Aeneas plunges into a hopeless battle where the only safety for the defeated is to hope for none. A few Trojans gather around him and they try the stratagem of carrying Greek shields emblazoned with Greek insignia. But although this wins them their only moment of success, the leader in this dubious tactic is not Aeneas, not even a Trojan, but Coroebus, who had arrived in Troy only a few days before. Inevitably their ruse is detected and they are overwhelmed. Aeneas is swept by the tide of battle to the palace of King Priam, the last centre of resistance. Here he joins the few surviving Trojans on the roof in levering down a tower, and rolling beams and gilded ceilings down on the heads of the Greeks. From there he sees Priam’s wounded son, Polites, come rushing into the palace pursued by Pyrrhus and die at his father’s feet. Aged as he is, Priam challenges Pyrrhus and is killed.

Here we might have asked why Aeneas saw this and lived to tell the tale. We might have asked why Aeneas did not come down off the roof and try to avenge his king. Virgil has forestalled that thinking by the very next words of Aeneas: ‘There came into my mind the image of my own dear father, as I looked at the king who was his equal in age breathing out his life with that cruel wound. There came into my mind also my wife Creüsa ... and the fate of young Iulus’ (560–563).

His divine mother now strips the mortal mist from his eyes and shows him a fearful vision of the Olympian gods tearing his city apart. Resistance now would be absurd. Venus escorts him to his home and he asks his father to leave Troy with him. Anchises refuses. In despair, Aeneas puts on his armour again and is rushing out to die in battle when fire is suddenly seen playing around Iulus’ head. As paterfamilias, father and priest of the family, Anchises prays to the gods for confirmation of the portent, and they see a star falling from the sky and ploughing its fiery path on Mount Ida. Anchises accepts the will of the gods and agrees to leave the city.

At this moment, the beginning of the history of Rome, Aeneas lifts his father up on his shoulders, takes his son in his left hand and his sword in his right, and with Creusa walking behind he passes through the burning city, starting at every breath of wind. When they gather with a few other fugitives outside the walls there comes what for Aeneas was the cruellest thing he saw in all the sack of the city. Creüsa is lost. He girds on his armour and rushes back into the captured city calling out her name at the top of his voice. Creüsa’s ghost appears to him and assures him that it is not the will of the gods that she should stay with him. She has no part to play in the great future which lies before him. Aeneas is to go with her blessing and never fail in his love for their son.

Aeneas has done all that a man could do. He goes back to the tattered remains of the people of Troy, hoists his father on to his shoulders and leads the way into the mountains.
Book 3 — The Wanderings

The flashback continues as Aeneas now gives an account of the wanderings of the Trojans after the fall of their city. After six years of hardship and failure, guided and misguided by prophecies and dreams, they arrive at Epirus in north-west Greece and are welcomed by another group of Trojan refugees, the priest-king Helenus and his wife, Andromache, once the wife of Hector. They had built a small-scale replica of Troy, but that was never going to be the solution for Aeneas, whose destiny was to found a great new city. Aeneas and his little fleet set sail again, and as they approach Sicily they follow the directions of Helenus and veer away south to circumnavigate it rather than go through the strait guarded by Scylla and Charybdis. At last they put in at Drepanum on the north-west tip of the island, where Anchises dies. So, at the banquet given by Dido, Aeneas ends his story of the fall of Troy.

Book 4 — Dido

Dido now loves Aeneas and Juno arranges a kind of marriage in order to keep him with Dido and prevent him from founding the city which was fated to destroy her beloved Carthage. Jupiter reminds Aeneas of his destiny and orders him to leave Dido. She senses that he is going to abandon her and builds a great pyre, ostensibly to cure herself of love by burning the relics of Aeneas’ stay. She curses Aeneas, calls upon her Carthaginians to wage eternal war against his people, and dies in the flames.

Dido’s Guilt

This book has gripped the imagination of readers for two millennia as a love story, and as such it needs little comment. Part of its power may come from the eternal questions it raises and does not answer: the suffering of the innocent and the deceived, the conflict between love and duty, and the relationship between free will and irresistible fate. The case against Dido could not be put more harshly than she puts it herself in her first speech and at line 552. When her husband died, she swore an oath that she would never love another man, and broke it to love Aeneas. Against that self-condemnation a substantial defence could be erected. Would it not be inhuman to hold a wife to such an oath taken in the moment of bereavement? It would certainly be harsh to condemn her to death for breaking it. Would any widow be condemned for marrying again? Certainly not in Virgil’s Rome. This case can be supported by the personal and political arguments in favour of marriage put so persuasively by Dido’s own sister.

But the clinching consideration is probably the unscrupulous cynicism of the two goddesses who engineer Dido’s destruction for their own ends. To protect her son Aeneas, Venus has already driven Dido into madness. Now, to block his destiny to found a city, Juno proposes that Aeneas should settle in Carthage as Dido’s husband. Venus, the daughter of Jupiter, has already been told by Jupiter himself that all this is totally contrary to his will, but she dissembles and urges Juno, the wife of Jupiter, to go and put this proposal to her husband. The two shrews play out their charade, each pursuing her own ends. Juno sets up a false marriage with herself as matron of honour, nymphs howling the wedding hymn and the fires of heaven’s lightning instead of marriage torches. The powerless human being is crushed between two goddesses.
This is to read the interview between them as a comedy of manners, a family squabble in Olympus. But the divine machinery allows us to hold in our minds a different view of Dido’s motivation. The quarrel between the goddesses could be seen as a dramatization of her emotions, the internal turmoil between love for Aeneas, longing for marriage, loyalty to her dead husband and duty to the city of which she is queen.

Be that as it may, the case against her is not strong. We are left bewildered and Virgil means us to be. At line 172 he says explicitly that she is guilty, she ‘called it marriage, using the word to cover her guilt’. On the other hand Juno, showing consideration at last, cuts short Dido’s death agony because her death is undeserved. Virgil knows better than to propose solutions to problems which can never be solved.

**Aeneas’ Love**

Aeneas loved Dido. We have this from Virgil after each of her first two appeals to him. But when Jupiter sends his messenger, Aeneas instantly decides to leave her. Once again the divine machinery provides double motivation. We have heard the voice of Jupiter in all his majesty and seen the brilliant flight of Mercury. At another level we could sense this as a dramatization of a sudden victory of duty over desire in Aeneas’ heart. Modern susceptibilities are offended, not least by his decision not to tell Dido — yet. This is a shrewd observation by Virgil of the sort of thing men do, and may well increase our sympathy for Dido. Aeneas is condemned also for the cold formality of his response to Dido’s appeals. On this count, however, it is more difficult to fault him. Her speeches are passionate, yet full of tight logic. At their first meeting after Dido divines that he is going to leave her, she hurls argument after argument. Given that he has taken an irreversible decision to leave her, he answers the points of which answer is possible in the best imaginable way. It all comes down to his statement that it is not by his will that he goes to Italy. Modern views of his behaviour tend to be severe. But it does not make sense that Aeneas, founder of the Roman race and ancestor of Augustus, should behave contemptibly in this Roman epic written by Virgil in praise of his patron. True, Aeneas’ decision not to tell Dido the truth immediately, shows him in a moment of weakness, and his replies to her are cold and feeble. But Aeneas is the hero of the poem, and his weakness and misery in this book are a measure of Virgil’s human understanding, not a demolition of the character of the hero of his epic.

These are the problems which linger after a reading of this book. The Aeneid would be a weaker poem if they could be solved. Dido’s fault, if fault there was, did not merit the punishment she received. Why then did she receive it? Aeneas put duty before love at the behest of the gods, and Dido and others have despised him for it. Was he then despicable? The goddesses are spiteful and heartless, but can we not imagine that Dido would have behaved as she did in a godless world, and that Aeneas would have left her even if Mercury had never swooped down from Mount Atlas to a roof in Carthage? All these questions are set in the context of Roman history. In one of Dido’s last speeches, for instance, she prophesies the Punic Wars and Hannibal’s invasion of Italy although she could not know the name of the avenger who would arise from her dead bones (622–629). These Roman questions touch upon human life in any era.
Book 5 — Funeral Games

On their way to Italy, the Trojans are caught in another storm and run before the winds back to Sicily where Anchises had died precisely one year before. Aeneas celebrates rites in his honour and holds funeral games. Weary with their wanderings, the Trojan women fire the ships, and Aeneas decides to leave the women, children and old men in Sicily in a city ruled by Acestes, the Trojan who had been their host in Sicily. Aeneas’ steersman Palinurus is lost overboard on the voyage to Italy.

Roman Religion

The tragedy of Book 4 is followed by the games of Book 5, but first Aeneas looks back at Carthage and sees the flames rising from the pyre on which Dido is dying. None of the Trojans knows what is causing the fire but their hearts are filled with foreboding, soon to be fulfilled by the storm which forces them to return to the place where Anchises had died. Here the piety of Aeneas shows in the scrupulous care with which he performs, for the first time in history, the rites of the Parentalia, the Roman festival of the dead, in honour of his father, who now becomes a god. The Aeneid is authenticating contemporary Roman religious practice by attributing its origins to the founder of the Julian family, and at the same time authenticating the stress upon the revitalization of Roman religion so dear to the heart of the contemporary Julian, Augustus.

Aeneas the Leader

There are tears at the heart of things, sunt lacrimae rerum, and for the Victorians Virgil was often seen as a sad presence brooding on the griefs of humanity. On the other hand, throughout these funeral games Aeneas is cheerful, inspiring, active, efficient, statesmanlike, and a sensitive leader of his men. He sets up the branch on an island to mark the turning point for the boat-race. He gives munificent prizes to every competitor, even to Sergestus when his ship limps home last. He is amused by the effrontery of Nisus and skilfully defuses a nasty situation when Nisus and Salius squabble over the prizes. He tries with a joke to tempt a challenger into the ring with the formidable Dares. When this fails, he conspires with Acestes to tempt the old champion Entellus to put on his gloves again, and when Entellus is on the rampage in this great boxing match, it is Aeneas who saves the life of Dares and shows supreme tact in consoling him for his defeat. He shows his statesman-like vision in acknowledging the blessing of the gods on his Trojan host, Acestes. When the competitive events are over he allows no gap. He has seen to everything. All he has to do to set in motion the grand cavalry display of the Trojan boys is to whisper a word in the ear of a young friend of Ascanius. Throughout, Father Aeneas cares like a father for his people, grieving when he is persuaded that it is the will of the gods and the wisest course that he should leave the women and children in Sicily in the new city of Segesta he founds for them under Acestes. Once again, the Aeneid looks forward from the legendary past to more recent events. (In the Punic Wars Segesta was to side with Rome.)

Throughout the poem Aeneas is said to be pius. But Roman pietas is not the same as our piety. It is not simply a matter of respecting the gods. Pietas requires that a man should do what is due and right not only by his gods, but also for his city, his family, his friends and his enemies. Apart from his lapse in Book 4, Aeneas is its embodiment,
and it shows vividly here. Perhaps this is part of the explanation of Montaigne’s view that the fifth book of the Aeneid seems to be the most perfect (‘le cinquiesme livre de l’Aeneide me semble le plus parfaict’, Essays 2.10).

**Book 6 — The Underworld**

Aeneas arrives in Italy at last, landing at Cumae just north of the Bay of Naples. There he consults the Sibyl, begging her to allow him to go down to the Underworld to see his father Anchises. She agrees to escort him on condition that he finds a golden branch in a dark tree and buries the body of Misenus, a comrade who has been drowned. These tasks he achieves and in the Underworld they meet, in reverse order of their deaths, Palinurus, Dido and heroes who had died at Troy. They proceed to the place of eternal torture of the damned and to the Fields of the Blessed where they find Anchises, who explains the creation of the universe and the origin of life, and takes them to see a parade of great Romans of the future marching up family by family towards the light of life.

**Why the Underworld?**

Why did Virgil send his hero down into the Underworld? In Virgil there is often more than one answer to a question. The simple explanation is that this allows him the emotional intensity of the scenes where Aeneas meets dead friends and enemies — his pilot Palinurus drowned in the crossing to Cumae, Dido ignoring his tears and words of love, Trojans who had died at the sack of the city, Greeks fleeing at his approach. This episode is also a watershed in the plot. In the Underworld Aeneas faces his memories and is given a view of the future. From this time forth he is looking towards the destiny of Rome. Another factor in Virgil’s decision must have been the Homeric model. Virgil is writing a Latin epic to stand beside the great epics of the Greeks. Odysseus had conversed with the shades over a trench filled with blood; Aeneas, too, will converse with the dead. The resemblances are obvious, but the differences are profound. There are two eloquent silences in classical epic. In the Odyssey Ajax, the great rival of Odysseus, stood aloof and would not speak, but went to join the other souls of the dead in Erebus. In the Aeneid Dido refuses to speak to Aeneas, but rushes off into a dark wood to rejoin Sychaeus who had been her husband. Virgil plunders Homer, and refashions what he takes.

The descent to the Underworld has also a philosophical dimension. Virgil puts on the lips of Anchises an explanation of the creation of the world and of the nature of life and death. Just as Plato ends The Republic with the Myth of Er, who tells how he died in battle and saw the souls of the dead waiting to rise again to rebirth, so Anchises shows to Aeneas the procession of his descendants moving up towards the light of life. The end of Book 6 is philosophy in epic.

It is also politics. Almost nine-tenths of the heroes represented in this parade are members of the Julian family. In a Roman funeral the masks of the ancestors were carried through the streets to their tombs while fathers would retell to their sons the achievements of their forefathers. In Virgil’s pageant of the heroes, the dead go in procession by families, not to their tombs along the Appian Way, but up to glorious rebirth while Anchises predicts their great achievements to his son. This book therefore ends with a funeral in reverse, culminating in a eulogy of the Julian family of Augustus.
and an obituary of his nephew, son-in-law and heir designate, young Marcellus; it is so powerful that Marcellus’ mother swooned when she heard Virgil speak it. The *Aeneid* is a poem set in the distant heroic past. To make it a political poem relevant to his own times, one of Virgil’s strategies is to include praise of Augustus in prophecies like the great speeches of Jupiter near the beginning and end of the poem, the history of the wars of Rome depicted on the prophetic shield of Aeneas at the end of Book 8 and here in the Parade of Future Romans, the prophecy which Anchises delivers to embolden his son with this vision of the destiny which lies before his family.

This is all fiction. The pageant is invented by Virgil. We do not know what Virgil’s beliefs were about the creation of the world or the transmigration of souls. Just as Plato’s myths are not meant to be taken as the literal truth but as stories resembling truth, so, after what started as a narrative of a journey and ends as a dream, Aeneas leaves the Underworld not by the Gate of Horn, the gate of true shades, but by the Gate of Ivory which sends up false dreams towards the heavens. At the beginning of the first century BC Meleager, in introducing the epigrams included in his *Garland*, had given Plato a golden branch to carry as his emblem. Perhaps the Golden Bough and the Gate of Ivory in the *Aeneid* are there to give us notice that the philosophy at the end of this book and the Parade of Future Romans are, like the Platonic myths, falsehoods resembling the truth.

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**Book 7 — War In Latium**

*Aeneas and his fleet sail into the mouth of the River Tiber and build a camp on its banks. Latinus, the king of Latium, welcomes them and offers Aeneas his daughter, Lavinia, in marriage. Seeing this, Juno sends down her agent Allecto to stir up resentment against Aeneas. She persuades Queen Amata to oppose Aeneas’ marriage and whips up Turnus, a neighbouring Latin prince, to go to war against the Trojans. She then engineers a skirmish between the local people of Latium and a Trojan hunting party led by Ascanius. War has begun.***

**Turnus and Allecto**

Turnus, prince of Ardea, had hopes of marriage to Latinus’ daughter and succession to his throne, and Queen Amata supported him. But when Allecto, disguised as an aged priestess, visited him in his sleep and urged him to war, he rebuffed her: ‘Leave peace and war to men. War is the business of men’ (444). Enraged, she threw a burning torch into his heart, and he woke sweating with terror and roaring for his armour. So much for the mythical narrative. At another level this could be read as an account of how a man’s rational assessment was overturned in the small hours by patriotic passion and rankling sexual jealousy. The narrative has treble power: as a vision of the supernatural, as an account of an emotional experience and as a dramatic scene between an old woman (who is more than a woman) and a tactless, passionate and impressionable young man.

**The Catalogue of Italian Allies**

Just as Homer provides in the second book of the *Iliad* a catalogue of the Greek ships which sailed against Troy, so here Virgil supplies a catalogue of the Italians who fought against the Trojans. To us it may read as an arid, largely alphabetical list of
anthropological curiosities and meaningless place names: Caeculus, found as a baby on a burning hearth at Praeneste, Abellans with their boomerangs, a snake-charming priest from Marruvium, etc. But this list would have struck Virgil’s audience quite differently. Many Romans had ties with the country districts of Italy, and would have been moved by this as a celebration of their local cultures, their links with Greece, the myths of Italy, local dress styles, armour, religion, even landscape, as in the twins of Tibur/Tivoli like centaurs plunging down a steep forest in Greece, which is not unlike the tree-clad cliff on which their city of Tibur stands.

Italy was a crucial part of Augustus’ power base, and at 8.678 Virgil visualizes Augustus leading the men of Italy against the forces of the East under Antony and Cleopatra. ‘Of its own free will,’ claims the Julian Augustus himself in his official obituary (Res Gestae 25), ‘the whole of Italy swore allegiance to me and demanded me as leader for the war in which I was victorious at Actium.’ Although the Italians go to war against the Julian Aeneas, they are never slighted in the Aeneid. At the end the stock of Rome is to be ‘made mighty by the manly courage of Italy’ (12.821–827). At a political level this catalogue of the peoples of Italy is a hymn to the indigenous peoples of Italy, and it accords with the stated policy of Augustus.

**Book 8 — Aeneas In Rome**

With the blessing of the god of the River Tiber, Aeneas goes to the village of Pallanteum, on what is later known as the Palatine, one of the seven hills of Rome. Here King Evander describes how Hercules had saved them from the ravages of the monster Cacus and tells the story of Mezentius, a brutal Etruscan despot who has been dethroned by his subjects and is being harboured by Turnus. Evander tells Aeneas of a prophecy which forbids the Etruscans to be led by an Italian, and advises him to go with a detachment of cavalry led by his son Pallas to claim leadership of all the armies opposed to the Latins. Venus, concerned for her son’s safety against these formidable enemies, persuades Vulcan to make new armour for Aeneas, including a prophetic shield depicting the future wars of Rome.

**The Politics**

This is not a book of intense dramatic incidents or heroic deeds, but it is vital to the argument of the Aeneid. On the face of it the Trojans are invaders in a foreign country, seizing land and power from the rightful inhabitants. But these aggressors are the ancestors of the Romans, and their leader Aeneas is the founder of the Julian family. A vital part of Augustus’ policy was his claim to be the beneficent leader of Italians as well as Romans against the barbarian East, and yet here at the dawn of Roman history his ancestor Aeneas is leading Orientals, that is the Trojans, against the native peoples of Italy. Book 8 tackles this difficulty and provides justification not only for Aeneas but also for Augustus’ rule over Italy.

The Romans loved their river, and Virgil’s first step is to show Father Tiber welcoming Aeneas to Latium. The opening of the book makes it clear, on the evidence of the god of the river, that Latium, in the centre of Italy, is the home decreed by the gods for Aeneas and his people. The second step is to provide historical warrant for the presence of the Trojans on Italian soil. This is achieved when Aeneas visits the future site of Rome, Pallanteum, a settlement of Greeks from Arcadia, and points out to its king, Evander, that
Dardanus, father of the Trojan people, had been born in Italy, and that Evander and himself were both descended from the god Atlas. Evander in turn recognizes Aeneas as the son of Anchises whom he had known and admired in his youth, and explains that the two families are therefore linked by the sacred tie of guest-friendship. Hence the lengthy genealogical discussions when Aeneas first meets Evander.

We have seen that Virgil expresses contemporary issues in his legendary tale by means of prophecies and visions, but there is another subtler technique at work in this book. Hercules had saved the settlement of Pallanteum from the ravages of the monster Cacus and had deigned to accept Evander’s hospitality. Now, on the very day of Hercules’ festival, arrives Aeneas who has also saved his people, will also stoop to enter that same little hut and will go on to found a city which will move to Pallanteum and become the city of Rome. There is a third saviour involved in this story. Rome was again saved, in Virgil’s day, by Augustus, who returned to Rome after the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra at Actium on 12 August 29 BC, the first day of the Festival of Hercules and who now lives simply and modestly in his house in what was Pallanteum and is now the Palatine Hill. ‘You ... must have the courage to despise wealth,’ says Evander as he invites Aeneas to enter his simple little hut. ‘You must mould yourself to be worthy of the god’ (364–365). The god is Hercules. Aeneas himself will become a god. But now Augustus, famed for the simplicity of his daily life and another saviour of Rome, is dwelling on that same spot, and he, too, will be a god.

An important part of the story of Rome is the long series of wars by which she subdued the peoples of Italy, culminating in the fierce and bloody Social War of 90–88 BC. Just as the defeat of Cacus is a pre-enactment of the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra and the arrival of Aeneas at Pallanteum is a pre-enactment of the return of Augustus, so the war in Italy in the second half of the Aeneid is a pre-enactment of the Social War. This is why the Latins who confront Aeneas are presented as courageous and virtuous peoples, eventually defeated but never disgraced. This is why they are put in the wrong not for any vices of their own but by the malice of Juno and the fact that Turnus, prince of the Latin city of Ardea, is harbouring Mezentius, a tyrant whose vices would attract adverse comment even in our own day. The other Etruscans are baying for his blood but they are waiting for a leader, and a prophecy has said that they must not be led by any man of Italy. So the scene is set. Aeneas has an ancestor who came from Italy; he has a guest-friend and relative in Evander to justify his presence in Italy; he has allies in Etruria who have just cause to go to war and who need a leader. Aeneas’ presence and position in Italy are therefore legitimated. This has implications for the whole Julian family and in particular for its contemporary representative who rules Italy and the whole known world from his house on the hill which had been Pallanteum.

**The Humanity**

This discussion has moved into the politics of the epic, but the first thing to grasp about the Aeneid is its humanity. In this part of the poem we may be struck by two recurring motifs: the beauty of youth and the depth of the love between parent and child. Pallas, son of Evander, is an important figure. We meet him for the first time when the masts of Aeneas’ ships are seen gliding through the trees on the banks of the Tiber, and we can gauge his ardour and courage as he leaps up to confront these formidable strangers. Evander in his young days had known Anchises, and the joy with which he recognizes his old friend’s son testifies to the warmth of his admiration. Then later, when
he explains that he is too old to go to war, and gives Aeneas charge of young Pallas on his first campaign, we are left in no doubt of the intensity of Evander’s love for his son and the solemnity of the responsibility he lays upon Aeneas.

There is another very different manifestation of parental affection when Venus, alarmed by the formidable Italians whom Aeneas is about to confront in battle, persuades her husband Vulcan, the god of fire, to make a shield for the son she bore to her mortal lover Anchises. When Venus persuades, she seduces. Vulcan then sleeps and rises early to go to work in his foundry, and his rising is compared to the early rising of a virtuous peasant woman who goes to work in order to keep chaste her husband’s bed and bring her young sons to manhood. It is impossible to feel secure about the tone of this astonishing episode. It is probably a contribution to the comedy of the divine in the Aeneid, but it certainly is also a demonstration of Venus’ motherly concern for her son, and a tribute to the courage and prowess of the people of Italy, and therefore a part of the politics of the Aeneid.

Art Described in Epic

There never was such a shield as Virgil describes, but he does his best to make us believe in it. There are repeated references to colours, like the silver geese in the golden portico and the golden torques on the milk-white (does that suggest ivory?) necks of the Gauls scaling the Capitol in their striped cloaks. There are suggestions of texture in the she-wolf bending back her neck to lick the twin babies into shape, in matrons in cushioned carriages, in blood dripping from bramble bushes or reddening the furrows of Neptune’s fields. There are vivid scenes: the rape of the Sabine women, Augustus at Actium with the Julian Star shining over his head, the River Araxes furious at being bridged. There are sound effects, as so often in descriptions of works of art in classical epic: when we hear at the Battle of Actium the barking of the dog-headed god Anubis; the cracking of the bloody whip of Bellona; the babel of all the tongues of the earth in the triumphal procession in Rome. There is also serial narration depicting successive episodes of a narrative all within the same frame, as when Cleopatra’s fleet advances, Apollo draws his bow, Cleopatra pays out the sail ropes for flight, runs before the wind for Egypt, and at the last the Nile, with grief in every lineament of his body, beckons his defeated people into his blue-grey breast and secret waters.

This is a vivid description of an imaginary work of art. It is also praise of Augustus. Three-fifths of this depiction of ‘the story of Italy and the triumphs of the Romans’ (626) are devoted to Augustus’ defeat of Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium, and in line with Augustan propaganda the name of Antony is never mentioned. Civil war is presented as though it were a conflict between the barbarian East and the civilized world of the West. Augustus also received a shield, the Shield of Valour, presented to him by the Senate and People of Rome to honour his courage, clemency, justice and piety.
When Aeneas and Pallas are on their mission to the Etruscans, the Trojan camp is attacked by Turnus and his Rutulians. In accordance with the strict instructions given by Aeneas, the Trojans close the gates and decline battle. Nisus and Euryalus die on a night foray and Ascanius kills Numanus. The siege continues and Turnus breaks into the Trojan camp. In his fury and folly he slaughters Trojans instead of opening the gates, and eventually is forced to withdraw and swim the Tiber fully armed to return to his men.

Virgil was moved by the glory and the grief of the deaths of the young in battle. His story of Nisus and Euryalus is also a delicate portrayal of the passionate love between two young men. Less obviously, it is a negative example. By their blunders and their impetuosity, by their neglect of the disciplines of war and above all by their failure to show respect to the gods, they are standing exemplars of what Aeneas is not.

The crucial mistake by Nisus is to take young Euryalus with him on this perilous mission. In a similar situation in Homer's *Iliad*, Diomede chose as his companion Odysseus, the cleverest of the Greeks — 'the skill of his mind is without equal' — and Odysseus justified the choice. Here Nisus does not want Euryalus to go with him, but allows the younger man to take the crucial decision. It is Euryalus who wakes sentries to keep guard for Nisus and himself when they go to tell the council of their plan.

The council of chosen Trojan warriors is also at fault. The original plan suggested by Nisus was to take a message to Aeneas, but now the young heroes propose to set an ambush, kill large numbers of the enemy and come back laden with booty. Aletes, though 'heavy with years and mature in judgement' (246), approves this madcap scheme, and young Ascanius enthusiastically welcomes it, promising all manner of extravagant rewards, including the horse of Turnus, the enemy leader.

They set out, enter the Rutulian camp and slaughter their sleeping enemies where they lie. Nisus eventually realizes that daylight is coming and checks Euryalus, but still allows him to put on armour he had plundered from the dead — medallions, a gold-studded belt, a helmet with gorgeous plumes. The helmet is their undoing. A passing detachment of three hundred cavalry catches sight of it glinting in the moonlight. Nisus escapes but Euryalus is captured, hampered by the booty he is carrying. Nisus sees him being carried off by the enemy and breaks cover in a hopeless attempt at rescue. Whenever Aeneas begins an undertaking, he prays to the great gods, to Jupiter, Juno, Apollo, Mars or to his mother. But here Ascanius swears by his own head, and Nisus by chance, Vesta, his household gods, the sky and the stars. At the end, when his beloved Euryalus is in mortal danger, Nisus prays at last, but prays only to Diana, the moon goddess, who had just betrayed them.

There are no doubts about their ardour or their courage or their love, and Virgil steps out of his role as anonymous narrator to salute them and rejoice in their immortality, but he has already made it plain that the weaknesses of youth, lack of judgement, of discipline and of piety are not the stuff of which Roman leaders are made. Aeneas is a different kind of man.
Ascarius Kills Numanus

Before his return Ascanius will have had his baptism of fire. A young Latin warrior, husband of the sister of Turnus, Numanus Remulus speaks up for the Latins against these effeminate incomers from the East. The Latins are a race of hardy sons of toil, and these ‘Phrygians’ from Troy are effete [effeminate], with their saffron and purple robes and their sleeved and beribboned bonnets. They are women, not men, playing tambourines and flutes in their dubious women’s rites on Mount Ida. This is the case against the Trojans and it has to be answered because the Trojans are the ancestors of the Romans. Ascanius gives the only possible answer, and Apollo instantly withdraws him from the battle, but not before prophesying the glory of his descendants. ‘This is the way,’ he tells Iulus, ‘which leads to the stars. You are born of the gods and will live to be the father of gods’ (642), and Virgil’s audience would have taken the point. At Caesar’s funeral games a comet appeared, which was hailed by the common people as proof that Caesar had been received among the gods. We have already had sightings of this Julian Star at critical moments in Julian history, at 2.694 when Anchises consents to leave Troy and at 8.681 on Octavian’s helmet at Actium. It was probably also generally understood in the twenties BC that Augustus, his adoptive son, would be deified. Finally, the peace which Apollo proceeds to prophesy is the Pax Augusta, the peace which Augustus was promising to bring to the whole Roman world, coming not from Troy, but from a much greater city. As Apollo says, ‘Troy is not large enough for you’ (644). The honour of the Julians is thus vindicated by Ascanius/Iulus, and his descendants are cleared of the imputations levelled by Numanus.

Book 10 — Pallas And Mezentius

Aeneas returns at the head of the Etruscan armies. Turnus kills Pallas and tears the belt off his dead body. As Aeneas slaughters the Latins in an orgy of revenge, Juno saves Turnus from his fury by spiriting him from the battlefield. Mezentius takes his place, and in battle with Aeneas his life is saved by the intervention of his young son Lausus. Aeneas kills Lausus, and the wounded Mezentius challenges him and dies in single combat.

The Council of the Gods

Jupiter opens the debate of the council of the gods by asking why Italians are at war with Trojans against his express will. Strange. After all he is omniscient — he knows the answer to all questions, and he is omnipotent — his will is the unalterable decree of fate. That is the theology, but in epic theology does not always apply. Sometimes Jupiter is not the all-powerful lord of the universe, but the father of a rowdy family where there is constant trouble between jealous wife and unruly daughter. The gods in epic sweep the action to the heights, as at the beginning and end of this episode. They also pull it down to the level of domestic comedy, as when Venus and Juno wrangle in council like a pair of rhetorically trained fishwives.

Venus complains that after all these years her son is still homeless and his people are under siege again, this time on Italian soil; Juno says that if they are suffering, it is by their own choice. Venus pretends to believe that the destiny of empire pronounced by Jupiter at the beginning of the epic is being altered; Juno’s reply is that the Trojans are not fulfilling their destiny, but obeying the prophecies of a madwoman, Priam’s daughter.
Cassandra. Venus objects to the storm Juno raised against Aeneas in Book I; Juno wilfully misunderstands and says that Aeneas’ voyage back from Etruria is none of her doing. In Venus’ view Turnus is swollen with his success in war; for Juno he is taking his stand in defence of his native land. Venus grumbles because she is at risk from the violence of mere mortals; Juno’s reply sketches Turnus’ descent from the gods of Italy. Venus tries to rouse pity for the Trojans because of the absence of Aeneas; Juno advises him to stay away. It is an established device of ancient oratory to appeal for clemency by bringing in the children of the defendant at the end of a speech. Venus brings in Ascanius, and begs to be allowed, if all else is lost, to take him to safety in one of her beautiful sanctuaries in Amathus, Paphos, Cythera or Idalium; Juno taunts her by telling her to be content with Paphos, Idalium and Cythera and to keep away from these rough Italians. Point by point Juno has stripped down Venus’ arguments, offering two lies for every one by Venus and adding half-a-dozen new ones of her own.

The speeches of Sinon in Book 2 were a satirical attack upon Roman rhetoric, the technical study of the arts of persuasion on which Roman education was based. This clash between Venus and Juno is the coup de grâce. Why should Virgil launch these attacks upon the false values of Roman rhetoric? An obvious approach to this question would be to connect it with the political conditions of the day. In the first century BC the Roman republic was torn apart by the rivalries of ambitious men, fought out not only on battlefields but also in political debates in the Senate and in political trials in the courts. In both arenas, lies, calumny [slander], melodrama [sensational, dramatic exaggeration], confrontational debate, all the vices of rhetoric, had been common coin. The Augustan settlement took the power from these arenas and lodged it with the princeps, and the style of government changed. Augustus had no love for the liberties which had destroyed the republic and had no intention of allowing them to weaken his own position. We may remember that Anchises in the Underworld started his litany of the areas in which Greeks would surpass Romans by saying ‘Others will plead cases better’ (6.849), a calculated obliteration of the memory of Rome’s greatest orator. Augustus had connived at the killing of Cicero in 43 BC. He would also have enjoyed Virgil’s demolition of rhetoric.

The Death of Mezentius

According to an ancient commentator the Aeneid is written to imitate Homer and to praise Augustus with respect to his family. But panegyric [a speech of praise] is raised to poetry by Virgil’s deep sense that victory has its price. The Latin warriors, we have seen, are courageous and upright, and they and their women suffer the cruelty of war. Dido is a noble queen who died a death she did not deserve, and Virgil so told her story that for over two millennia men have grieved for her. Turnus is the great enemy of the hero of the epic, but by the end of it he has claims to our admiration and pity. Mezentius is a villain through and through, a monster of cruelty to his subjects and a scorners of the gods, but when he stands alone against all his enemies we begin to admire him. When he refuses to cut down Orodes from the rear and manoeuvres to meet him face to face, we know we are in the presence of a hero. The most revealing moment comes with his answer to Orodes’ dying taunt: ‘Die now. As for me, that will be a matter for the Father of the Gods and the King of Men’ (743–744). The scorners of the gods is now admitting and accepting the supremacy of Jupiter. It is almost as though Virgil had not the heart to let the villain die a villain. When the balance of Mezentius’ life is about to swing from wickedness to tragedy, Virgil’s sympathies reach out towards him.
Soon Mezentius is wounded by Aeneas, and would have been killed had not his son Lausus so loved his father, that, lightly armed as he was, he threw himself between the combatants. Aeneas kills him, and when he sees his dying face and features, the face ‘strangely white’, he is reminded of his love for his own father (821–822) and we too are reminded of it when Virgil here refers to Aeneas by his patronymic, Anchisiades, son of Anchises. Our sympathies are divided. Then, while Mezentius is trying to recover from his wound on the banks of the Tiber, he hears the wailing in the distance and knows the truth, and bursts into a paroxysm of grief and self-hate. Before Mezentius goes to fight his last battle, like Achilles in the Iliad, he addresses his horse, and each man’s utterance is a testimony to human and animal courage and the obstinacy of affection. Nothing in Mezentius’ life becomes him like the leaving it.

Crude panegyric [a speech of praise] is unrelieved, direct praise with no regard for truth. The panegyric of the Aeneid praises Augustus, intermittently and often obliquely, and it is always based upon a genuine and intelligent response by the poet to the contemporary political situation. It also takes in a great sweep of human experience. While saluting the victor and acclaiming his victories, Virgil records the sufferings of the defeated and of the innocent. He also acknowledges the cost to the victors in the persons of Aeneas and Augustus.

**Book 11 — Drances and Camilla**

Pallas is mourned and his funeral rites conducted. The Latins send an embassy to Aeneas to beg a truce in order to gather up their dead. He consents and makes it clear that the war was not of his choosing. Turnus could have met him in single combat and only one man would have died. The Latins engage in fierce debate, Drances abusing Turnus and pleading for an end to the war, Turnus returning the abuse and offering to meet Aeneas in single combat. Despite that, when news comes that Aeneas is approaching the city, Turnus immediately rouses his forces for battle. The maiden Camilla volunteers to confront the enemy cavalry while Turnus waits in ambush for Aeneas in a pass in the hills. Camilla is killed, and Turnus gives up his ambush. A moment later Aeneas enters the pass, and both armies move towards the city of Latinus within sight and sound of each other.

This book, like all the books of the Aeneid, can be divided into three sections; here, the funerals, the debate, the cavalry engagement. In each of these the dice are weighted against Turnus and to the credit of Aeneas. In the first Aeneas’ great grief at Pallas’ death was partly because he had failed to protect the young man in his first battle, but Latinus insists that Aeneas is in no way to be blamed for his son’s death. In his dealings with the Latins (100–121), Aeneas behaves with clemency and consideration. At the debate in the Latin assembly a report is received by an embassy which had been sent to ask help from Diomede, whom Aeneas had called the ‘bravest of the Greeks’ (1.96). Diomede had refused: ‘We have faced each other, spear against deadly spear, and closed in battle. Believe me, for I have known it, how huge he rises behind his shield’ (282–284). At the end of the assembly King Latinus blamed himself for the war by his failure to give full support to Aeneas. And in the cavalry engagement, a question may hang over Turnus’ military judgement in granting such an important battle role to Camilla, and in his own impotence in sitting in ambush far from the battlefield and leaving the position at precisely the wrong moment: ‘this is what the implacable will of Jupiter decreed’ (901).
Book 12 — Truce and Duel

Turnus now demands to meet Aeneas in battle, and Aeneas and Latinus strike a treaty agreeing that the victor will receive Lavinia in marriage, and that if Aeneas is defeated, the Trojans will withdraw peacefully and settle with Evander in Pallanteum. But Juno suborns [to induce to commit an unlawful act] Turnus’ divine sister Juturna to engineer a violation of the treaty. In the mêlée which follows Aeneas is wounded by an arrow shot by an unknown assailant. He is healed by the intervention of Venus and returns to battle. Once again Turnus is rescued from the wrath of Aeneas — this time by Juturna — but when Aeneas attacks the city of Latinus, Turnus realizes his responsibilities and returns to the field. Jupiter and Juno are reconciled, and Juno gives up her opposition to the destiny of Rome. Aeneas wounds Turnus and kills him as he begs for mercy.

The Death of Turnus

‘I sing of arms and of the man’ is how Virgil began his epic, and nowhere does he sing more intensely of Aeneas than in the last book. It opens with bold words from Turnus as he steels himself for battle taunting Aeneas and issuing a ringing challenge: ‘Let the Trojan and Rutulian armies be at peace. His blood, or mine, shall decide this war’ (78–79). While he dons his splendid armour and girds on his sword (the wrong one, as shall emerge), roaring like a bull and lashing himself into a fury, Aeneas, too, is rousing himself to anger, but is also reassuring his allies, comforting his son, accepting the challenge and laying down the terms of the peace which will follow the duel.

The steadiness and maturity of Aeneas are thus shown by means of a contrast with the wildness of Turnus. This technique of tacit contrast is also used by Virgil when the armies meet to ratify the treaty. Day has dawned with the most glorious epic sunrise and the first witness Aeneas then calls upon is the Sun, a courteous compliment to Latinus since the Sun is his grandfather, but that address is followed immediately by an invocation of the great Olympians, Jupiter, Juno and Mars: Jupiter, since the golden rule is always to begin with him; Juno, because Aeneas is remembering the instructions he received from the god Tiber at the beginning of Book 8; and Mars, as god of battle and later to be the father of Romulus. This is theologically correct, and a striking contrast to the ragbag of divinities addressed by Latinus, ending, contrary to the golden rule, with Jupiter. The contrast demonstrates Aeneas’ piety towards the gods.

The next display of character by tacit contrast comes after the Rutulians, egged on by Juturna, have violated the treaty in the very moment of its ratification. In the battle which follows, Aeneas, unhelmeted, tries to control his allies, insisting that a treaty has been made and that by its terms no one is allowed to fight except Turnus and himself. But when the arrow comes whirring from an unknown hand and Aeneas is led wounded from the field, Turnus seizes his opportunity. Clapping on his armour he launches into a fierce and bloodthirsty attack upon the Trojan forces. The contrast demonstrates Aeneas’ sense of justice.

Some readers have found Aeneas an unsympathetic character, cold and inhibited. This notion is nowhere more thoroughly refuted than in the episode which follows. As he is taken back to the camp bleeding from his wound, he is in a fury of impatience, tugging at the broken arrowhead and ordering his comrades to hack it out of his flesh. There he stands in the camp growling savagely while the doctor plies his mute, inglorious art, and
the enemy are heard fighting their way nearer and nearer to the camp. No sooner has Venus healed the wound than he is throwing on his armour and storming back to battle. But first he takes his leave of Ascanius, whom he loves. Those who do not admire Aeneas are amazed that he does not take off his helmet to kiss his son. Others will listen to his words and see in Aeneas a heroic ideal in the Roman mould.

Turnus had cut a swathe of slaughter through the Trojan ranks, but when Aeneas now routs the Rutulians he ignores the fugitives. He is stalking Turnus, and only Turnus, and he would certainly have caught him, had not Juturna seized the reins of Turnus’ chariot and driven him off to kill stragglers in remote parts of the battlefield.

Betrayed, wounded and now thwarted, Aeneas erupts in an orgy of killing. Here we notice no difference between Aeneas and Turnus: in the heat of battle neither is a ‘verray parfit gentil knight’. Each is driven by uncontrollable passions of hatred, contempt, rivalry and revenge, and each taunts his wounded enemies and kills his suppliants. This is not a diminution of the individuals, but a fact of war, and part of the power of these last books is that Virgil does not flinch from fact. Until the mid twenties BC when Virgil was in his mid-forties, Rome had been in a continual state of war. He did not romanticize it. He knew as well as his contemporaries that ‘the essence of war is violence, and that moderation in war is imbecility’.

Aeneas’ attempt to end the war by single combat has failed. Turnus is not to be seen and full-scale battle is raging. At this desperate point Aeneas orders his men to break off the fighting and follow him to attack Latinus’ undefended city. His sole purpose is to smoke out Turnus, to bring him to combat, but even so, this is scarcely an act of high chivalry. At this point we see Virgil’s determination to preserve the character of his hero. The plan to attack an undefended city is not in origin his own: ‘At that moment Aeneas’ mother, loveliest of the goddesses, put it into his mind ... to lead his army’ (554–555) against the walls of the city. We have already seen double motivation in action, for example when Dido fell in love as a woman, while at the same time Venus and Cupid manoeuvred her into the madness of love. Here the double motivation made the event more complex and more profound. Here it is put to ingenious use. When the hero thinks of a course of action which does him little credit, any stain on his character is lessened by a narrative which attributes the motive force to a god, who by definition cannot be resisted.

The ruse works. Turnus hears the sounds of despair from the city and realizes that his sister has misled him. In a speech of great nobility he accepts the truth and resolves to return and confront Aeneas. The moment Aeneas hears the name of Turnus he abandons his attack on the city. The armies part to clear a space. The gods leave the field and what we see at the last is two men fighting. Turnus is wounded and begs for mercy for the sake of his father. At this Aeneas wavers, no doubt remembering his own father and also how he suffered when he killed Lausus, but then he catches sight of the belt which Turnus had plundered from the dead body of Pallas, the boy who had been given into his charge, and in a blaze of raging anger he plunges his sword into the breast of his defenceless enemy. Revenge is part of war, as Augustus knew. As a boy he had won the support of the legions by promising to avenge their beloved Caesar, and over the years he had hunted down every last one of the conspirators, formally recording his revenge at the beginning of his Res Gestae. Virgil passes no judgement on Aeneas. He describes it as it would have been.
The Solution

Meanwhile Juno, the greatest liar in the Aeneid, has not been idle. It is she who had suborned [to induce to commit an unlawful act] Juturna to go’ to the aid of Turnus in a speech which begins, as usual in rhetoric, with flattery, proceeds to self-justification and ends by urging Juturna into action while offering her no hope. But because Juno is trying to avoid responsibility, her instructions are so deviously expressed that Juturna barely understands them. Juno then loses patience and has to tell her straight out to go to rescue her brother or else stir up a war to block the signing of the treaty. When the arrow wounds Aeneas, no man knows who shot it but we know who was responsible, and so does Jupiter, as at the end of the Aeneid he smiles at his wife’s evasions.

This final interview between Juno and Jupiter is the solution to a central problem of the Aeneid, how the Roman empire is to be established against the opposition of Juno. The settlement is arranged in the final act of the divine comedy which has run through the whole poem. Although Juno has told Juturna that she cannot bear to watch the battle, Jupiter sees her doing so. He speaks affectionately to her, and then teases her gently: ‘What do you hope to achieve by perching there in those chilly clouds?’ He knows precisely what, and she knows that he knows. He then changes tack and pleads with her in loving terms: ‘Do not let this great sorrow gnaw at your heart in silence and do not make me listen to grief and resentment for ever streaming from your sweet lips.’ He then reminds her of what she has achieved. At the last, after the affection and the praise the command: ‘I forbid you to go further’ (791–806).

Juno submits, but not before a flood of bluster, face-saving and self-justification: ‘I, Juno, yield and quit these battles which I so detest’ (818). Having yielded, she now lays down her stipulations. Her essential point is that she will allow these Trojan men to settle in Italy and marry Italian wives, but only on condition that they forfeit all trace of their Trojan origins. Now we understand why the Trojan women had to be left in Sicily at the end of Book 5. Now we understand how the repeated slur of effeminacy is to be erased from the reputation of these incomers from the East. The Trojans are to lose their name and become Latins. They are to dress in the Italian style and give up their Oriental flounces, so mocked by Numanus Remulus in Book 9. The Alban kings are to rule from generation to generation, and we see that the wheel has come full circle. At the opening of the poem we were told that the Aeneid would reveal the origins of the Alban fathers. Now we remember that the Alban kings, like Augustus, are Julians, descended from Iulus. Juno’s last stipulation is the final cleansing of the bloodstock of the Trojans. Rome is to be made mighty by the manly virtue of Italy, sit Romana potens Ital a virtute propago. Vir is the Latin for ‘man’, and virtute is the Latin for manly courage, so this blend of blood will finally erase all trace of Oriental effeminacy from the founders of Rome. ‘Troy has fallen. Let it lie, Troy and the name of Troy’ (828).

‘He who devised mankind and all the world smiled’, and, remarkably, he goes on to remind Juno of their double relationship, brother and sister, husband and wife. He accepts her stipulations and adds his own details. The language of the new people will not be Trojan, but Latin. The overtones of Jupiter’s formulation are important. Latin was superseding the native tongues of Italy as the lingua franca of commerce, law and government. When Jupiter says that Ausonia (an ancient name for Italy) will keep the tongue of its fathers, he is suggesting some sort of justification for Latin against the languages which it is supplanting all over Italy. Throughout this dialogue of the gods Virgil is making his legend more plausible by linking it to known contemporary facts.
Jupiter will also provide ritual and modes of worship, another ingenious element. At the fall of Troy, Aeneas had been given a solemn charge to establish the Trojan gods in a new city. But Virgil does not wish to argue that the gods of Augustan Rome came from the East. Nor does he want Aeneas to negotiate away the gods which were his sacred responsibility, and capitulate to the Latins in a matter of such central importance in the *Aeneid*. The ingenuity of Virgil’s solution to this problem lies in the fact that Aeneas capitulates not to any man but to Jupiter, the supreme god of the Romans. No one could object to a religious ordinance imposed by Jupiter Best and Greatest. The discussion between Jupiter and Juno ends with his assurance that the Romans will surpass all men in piety and also all gods, a prophecy which is less astonishing than it seems, if we recollect that obedience to just authority is part of *pietas*, and that the gods have not always excelled in that virtue. In particular — his last assurance — no other race will be the equals of the Romans in doing honour to Juno.

Jupiter has the last word. Juno seems to have the last gesture. The Latin, like all Latin, is untranslatable, literally, ‘Rejoicing, she twisted back her mind’ (841). Juno then did in the end change her mind, but clearly, she found it a bitter-sweet experience. The domestic dispute is thus resolved. Turnus will be killed. Aeneas will marry Lavinia and found Lavinium, and world history will proceed according to the decisions of this humurous discussion between a god and his wife.

Divine machinery is an obsolete literary device, but it gives a great sweep of human interest to the *Aeneid* and as a dramatic representation of ordinary human relations and of the unpredictable in life, the place of justice in the world, the limits of human effort and understanding and the inscrutable splendour of the universe, it is not a bad model.