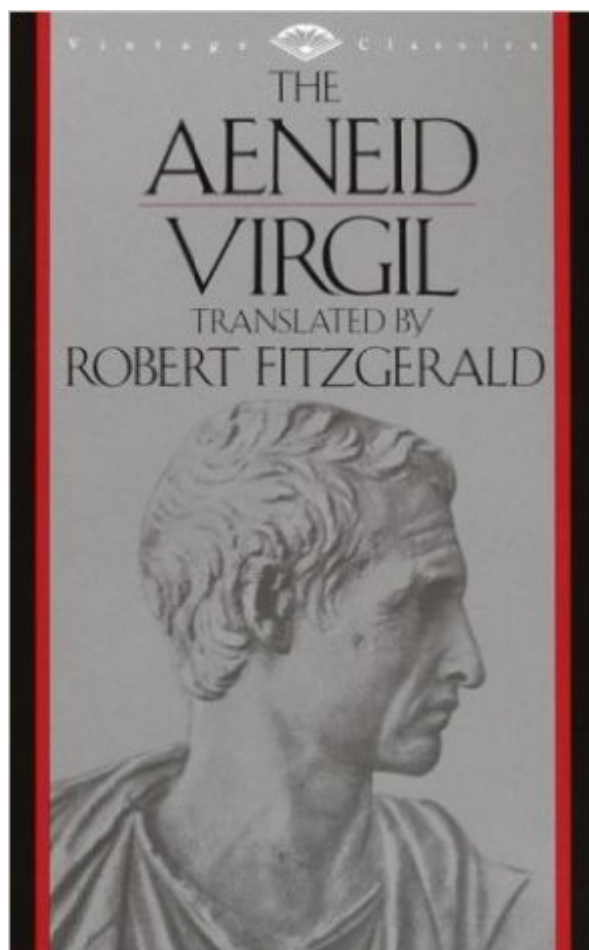


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The Aeneid (Vintage Classics)



Synopsis

Virgil's great epic transforms the Homeric tradition into a triumphal statement of the Roman civilizing mission. Translated by Robert Fitzgerald.

Book Information

Series: Vintage Classics

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Customer Reviews

There is no such thing as a "best" translation, only translations that suit one's purpose. If you want to read the Aeneid as a gripping story, Fagles's version does very well. I have just finished reading book 4, and Dido's fury, as set against the implacable higher purpose of Aeneas, has perhaps never been as vividly, even scarily, portrayed. On the other hand, it could be argued that Fagles's verse does not convey the stately or epic quality of the Latin in the way that, for instance, Fitzgerald's does. A short comparison may suffice: "sed nullis ille mouetur / fletibus aut uoces ullas tractabilis audit; / fata obstant placidasque uiri deus obstruit auris." (Vergil) "But no tears move Aeneas now. / He is deaf to all appeals. He won't relent. / The Fates bar the way / and heaven blocks his gentle, human ears." (Fagles) "But no tears moved him, no one's voice would he / Attend to tractably. The fates opposed it; / God's will blocked the man's once kindly ears." (Fitzgerald) Fitzgerald's version is closer to the Latin (other than not using the present tense), better reflects its formal nature, and achieves a Vergilian metrical effect with the three successive beats of "God's will blocked." But Fagles's free and fluid rendition is undoubtedly more engaging to the modern reader. Occasionally Fagles does introduce a modern idiom that is trite or jarring. For instance, when the sea-nymph

speeds Aeneas's ship on its way in Book 10, she does so skillfully ("haud ignara modi") because she "knows the ropes". The book has a useful introduction, a few notes, and a pronouncing glossary. Fagles's postscript is, however, a tedious pastiche of quotations from previous critics and could have been omitted.

Publius Vergilius Maro was commissioned by Caesar Augustus to author a national epic for Rome. The work which Virgil composed for this purpose was the Aeneid. It is an epic poem that tells the story of a minor character from Homer's Iliad who leads a rag-tag band from the smouldering ruins of Troy in order to found a "New Troy" to the west: Rome. It is in the Aeneid, not the Iliad (as most people who have not read the works tend to believe) that we see the spectacle of the Trojan Horse & the famous line "I do not trust Greeks bearing gifts." The Iliad ends with the death of Hektor - before the plan of the Trojan Horse is devised by Odysseus. The Odyssey picks up after the sack of Troy. The Aeneid fills in the gaps & narrates the story of the few Trojans who escape the wrath of the Greeks. According to legend, Romulus & Remus (the two brothers who eventually founded the city itself) were descendents of Aeneas. As is usual, Fitzgerald's translation is top notch. I have read Mandelbaum's rendition as well & much prefer Mr. Fitzgerald. The book also contains a useful glossary & postscript which help elucidate the allusions to Hannibal & Cleopatra which the Romans of Virgil's day would have picked up right away, but which might be unfamiliar to modern day readers. Also, it is HIGHLY recommended that one read the Iliad & the Odyssey before embarking on Virgil's work. [...] But, for a quick answer: the reason that Juno (Hera in the Greek) has a vendetta against Aeneas is due to the fact that he is Trojan. This all derives from the judgment of Paris when Juno was "jilted" by the bribe that Aphrodite offered Paris (also a Trojan). To offer any more info at this point would be too great of a digression, but what I will say is that this work is NOT (I repeat NOT) for someone to merely pick up & dive into w/out doing his or her pre-requisite reading. Do your homework, become familiar with the myths & tales of what has gone on before, then read the Aeneid. You will be glad you did, for this is an extraordinary epic. Also, for those who harbor the ambition, the university of Oxford professor Peter Levi has recently written a wonderful, succinct biography of Virgil. "The Death Of Virgil" by Hermann Broch is a mind-blowing masterpiece as well. Indeed, one can never get enough Virgil.

Although Virgil spent years writing the Aeneid, by his death, he felt that it was imperfect and asked that it be burned. Luckily for all concerned, his request was denied or we'd never have this epic. If you are new to Greek and Roman epics, I'd recommend starting with the Iliad and the Odyssey first.

Not only will most novices find them more readable (especially the Odyssey), any reader will pick up important background information that will help immeasurably in following the Aeneid. Although I'm a huge fan of the Aeneid and have read many of the books in the original Latin, I'd suggest to most readers just to read books 1,2,4 and 6 unless you are really drawn in. It's not that the other books are not great (they are), it's just that unless you are a specialist, you won't want to read all about the battles and extra stuff -- book 4 is the love story of Dido and Aeneas and for many is the highlight of the poem. Book 6 is the trip to the underworld which is so important to later writers and poets like Dante, TS Eliot, etc.... The fall of Troy is contained in books 1 and 2. I enjoy Fitzgerald's translation, but as an amateur Latinist, I prefer Allan Mandelbaum's translation with Moser's illustrations. When I was translating from the Latin, only Mandelbaum was so close to the original that he could help a student. I think Mandelbaum is a genius for rendering the poem so close to the original. It's unfair to call him wooden -- Virgil wrote the whole thing in Dactylic hexameter which is hardly wooden in Latin, although it can be repetitive at times. Not to worry -- he used a lot of spondaic substitutions (altering a long, short short with a long, long) to vary the meter. So, if you just want a taste, read books 1,2,4 and 6 and if you love it, by all means read the whole epic.

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