

SCALA GENTIUM

Reading God's Two Books with the Gospel of Matthew

Aeneid • Book VI

Virgil — translated by Theodore C. Williams

with the Sibyl's own story from Ovid, Metamorphoses XIV — translated by Brookes More

Unit I • The Shelf — read across Weeks 1–8

SHELF READER

The unit's anchor classic, whole and in order. The story remains the seminar text; this is the world it walks through — and everything the story's Sibyl told you about her cave, her bough, and her descent can be checked against these pages.

BEFORE YOU READ

How to Read the Shelf

The Shelf is independent reading: about fifteen to twenty minutes, three evenings a week, taken out of the reading time you already owe — never piled on top of it. Four times this unit, a class day will turn to what you have read; the plan below tells you what to have finished and what to look for. This book, like the Reader, is yours to write in. Make four kinds of marks:

Check the margin — a check mark — wherever the poem makes good on something the story claimed: the cave, the hundred mouths, the bough. Where the printed hand  points, the editors found one; your pencil will find more.

Underline any line that could be true outside the poem — these feed the chreia and maxim exercises, and this book is full of them.

Circle every name of a real person or place, to find in the History Companion.

? in the margin where you are confused. Confusion is material for the touchpoint, not a failure.

The reading plan

Visit	Lines	Weeks	Look for
I · The God in the Cave	6.1–155	1–2	the cave of a hundred mouths; the frenzy; the price of the descent
II · The Golden Bough	6.156–425	3–4	the bough; the burial of Misenus; Charon and the unburied
III · The Fields of the Dead	6.426–702	5–6	Dido's silence; the walls of Tartarus; the father found
IV · The City to Come	6.703–901 + Ovid	7–8	the doctrine of souls; the parade of Rome; Marcellus; the ivory gate

Week 9 is the thesis and the exam: bring your marked copy. Honors readers, see the note at the back of this book.

THE MARGIN IS THE TOOL

Glosses sit beside the lines they serve, as in the Reader. Small grey numbers (6.42) are the *Latin* poem's line numbers — cite them, and any edition of Virgil in any language will open to the same place.

A LINE OF LATIN

Facilis descensus Averno. — 6.126

A few famous lines appear in the margin in Virgil's own Latin, with their sense beneath. Read them aloud; several of them the educated world still quotes.

BEFORE THE POEM

What You Are Holding

The *Aeneid* is the poem of Rome. Virgil wrote it in the last eleven years of his life, from about 29 to 19 BC — the very years the story has been teaching you, when Augustus was closing the age of civil war and the Fourth Eclogue’s promise still hung in the air. It tells how Aeneas escaped the fall of Troy and carried his gods to Italy to found the race from which Rome would spring. Virgil died with the poem not yet polished, asking that it be burned; Augustus ordered it published instead.

Book VI is its hinge and its summit. At Cumae — the Sibyl’s Cumae — Aeneas goes down among the dead to find his father, and comes back carrying the future. Romans knew this book by heart; Dante loved it so well that when he needed a guide through his own underworld, he chose its author. You are reading it in the translation of Theodore C. Williams, made in 1910: blank verse, the meter of Shakespeare, in a register your Douay-Rheims has already taught you to hear.

One rule, before you begin: the story is the seminar text, and this poem is the world it walks through. Where the two touch, the margin will point. Where they differ, so much the better — that difference is a question, and questions are what the touchpoints are for.

blank verse unrhymed lines of ten syllables, five beats — English’s native meter for high matter

19 BC the year Virgil died at Brundisium — and a year you can place: four years after Gallus’s death in the story

BEFORE THE POEM

The Story Before the Poem

Virgil's first readers arrived knowing a thousand years of story. You need only this page.

Why the gods are divided. Long before the poem opens, a golden apple marked “for the fairest” was thrown among the goddesses, and Paris, a prince of Troy, was made the judge. Juno offered him power and Minerva wisdom; Venus offered him the most beautiful woman in the world, and he chose Venus. Juno and Minerva never forgave Troy for it. When the poem calls Juno “burden of the sons of Troy,” that apple is why.

The war. The woman Venus promised was Helen, already a Greek king's wife. Paris carried her home to Troy, and the Greeks came after her with a thousand ships. For ten years they besieged the city; Achilles, their greatest warrior, killed Hector, Troy's greatest, and was himself killed by an arrow from Paris's bow — an arrow, this poem says, that Apollo aimed. Troy never fell to force. It fell to the wooden horse: a gift with soldiers inside, wheeled through the gates by the Trojans themselves.

The man. Aeneas was a Trojan prince, son of the goddess Venus and a mortal man, Anchises. On the night the city burned he carried his crippled father on his back, led his small son by the hand, and bore his household gods in his arms — the most famous picture of duty the ancient world made. His wife was lost in the flames behind him. The gods had promised him a new homeland in the west, in Italy, where his line would one day found Rome.

The wanderings. Seven years of sea and false landings followed. At Carthage in Africa he was sheltered by its queen, Dido, who loved him; at the gods' command he sailed away, and she died by her own hand with his sword. In Sicily, old Anchises died — so the father Aeneas now seeks among the dead is newly lost, a grief still raw.

Now. The fleet has crossed at last to Italy, and Aeneas climbs the hill at Cumae to ask the Sibyl for the road down to his father. That is where line one begins — and it is everything you need. The rest, the margin carries.

Troy a great walled city in what is now western Turkey; its fall was the hinge of the ancient world's imagination

Helen “the face that launched a thousand ships” — a later poet's phrase for her

BEFORE THE POEM

The Names You Need

Twelve names do nearly all the work. Romans grew up with them; you have this table and the margin, which is enough.

Name	Also called	Who they are
Jupiter	Jove	king of the gods; what he wills, the poem often calls Fate
Juno	—	his queen; hates Troy, hounds Aeneas
Venus	—	goddess of love — and Aeneas's mother and protector
Apollo	Phoebus; "the god of Delos"	prophecy, poetry, the sun; the Sibyl's master
Diana	Trivia; below the earth, Hecate	one goddess, three faces: the moon, the hunt, and the crossroads of the dead
Minerva	Pallas	wisdom and war-craft; the horse was an "offering" to her
Neptune	—	the sea
Mars	—	war; through Romulus, ancestor of Rome
Mercury	—	the gods' messenger, guide of souls
Pluto	Dis; Orcus	king of the dead
Proserpine	—	his stolen queen, to whom the Golden Bough is sacred
Saturn	—	Jove's father, who reigned in the old age of gold

No one expects you to arrive knowing these people. When a strange name appears — and dozens will — circle it, glance at the margin or this table, and read on. Understanding the line does not require placing every name; the poem carries you, and by the second Visit the water is familiar.

GOING DEEPER

For the stories behind the names, the classic companion is Thomas Bulfinch's *The Age of Fable* (1855) — plain English, written for exactly your situation, and free at Project Gutenberg. Its chapters on the Trojan War and on Aeneas cover this unit; one of them, "Virgil's Description of the Region of the Dead," walks through this very book — and retells the legend of the nine books.

VISIT I · WEEKS 1 AND 2

The God in the Cave — Aeneid 6.1–155

Aeneas lands on the very shore where the story's Prologue hangs its jar. He climbs to the temple Daedalus built, and the Sibyl — the same Sibyl — takes him into her cave of a hundred mouths. The god seizes her; she prophesies wars; and when Aeneas asks the road down to his father among the dead, she names the price of the journey. Read with your pencil out: nearly everything the story claimed about this place is here to be found.

After such words and tears, he flung free rein
 To the swift fleet, which sped along the wave
 To old Euboean Cumae's sacred shore.
 They veer all prows to sea; the anchor fluke
 Makes each ship sure, and shading the long strand
 The rounded sterns jut o'er. Impetuously
 The eager warriors leap forth to land
 Upon Hesperian soil. One strikes the flint
 To find the seed-spark hidden in its veins;
 One breaks the thick-branched trees, and steals away
 The shelter where the woodland creatures bide;
 One leads his mates where living waters flow.
 Aeneas, servant of the gods, ascends
 The templed hill where lofty Phoebus reigns,
 And that far-off, inviolable shrine
 Of dread Sibylla, in stupendous cave,
 O'er whose deep soul the god of Delos breathes
 Prophetic gifts, unfolding things to come.
 Here are pale Trivia's golden house and grove.

Here Daedalus, the ancient story tells,
 Escaping Minos' power, and having made
 Hazard of heaven on far-mounting wings,
 Floated to northward, a cold, trackless way,
 And lightly poised, at last, o'er Cumae's towers.
 Here first to earth come down, he gave to thee
 His gear of wings, Apollo! and ordained
 Vast temples to thy name and altars fair.
 On huge bronze doors Androgeos' death was done;
 And Cecrops' children paid their debt of woe,
 Where, seven and seven,—O pitiable sight!—

6.1

Cumae a Greek city on the Bay of Naples, Italy's oldest Greek colony. The story's Prologue hangs its jar above this shore.

Phoebus "the bright one": Apollo, god of prophecy and poetry; Delos is the island of his birth

Trivia "she of the three ways": Diana, who beneath the earth is Hecate, lady of crossroads and of the dead

6.14

Daedalus the master craftsman who built the Labyrinth for King Minos of Crete, then escaped on wings of his own making; his son Icarus flew too near the sun

Androgeos son of Minos, slain at Athens; his death was avenged with a yearly tribute of seven youths and seven maidens for the Minotaur

Achates Aeneas's ever-faithful companion

Deiphobe the Sibyl's own name, daughter of the sea-god Glaucus

The youths and maidens wait the annual doom,
 Drawn out by lot from yonder marble urn.
 Beyond, above a sea, lay carven Crete:—
 The bull was there; the passion, the strange guile;
 And Queen Pasiphae's brute-human son,
 The Minotaur—of monstrous loves the sign.
 Here was the toilsome, labyrinthine maze,
 Where, pitying love-lorn Ariadne's tears,
 The crafty Daedalus himself betrayed
 The secret of his work; and gave the clue
 To guide the path of Theseus through the gloom.
 O Icarus, in such well-graven scene
 How proud thy place should be! but grief forbade:
 Twice in pure gold a father's fingers strove
 To shape thy fall, and twice they strove in vain.
 Aeneas long the various work would scan;
 But now Achates comes, and by his side
 Deiphobe, the Sibyl, Glaucus' child.
 Thus to the prince she spoke:
 "Is this thine hour
 To stand and wonder? Rather go obtain
 From young unbroken herd the bullocks seven,
 And seven yearling ewes, our wonted way."
 Thus to Aeneas; his attendants haste
 To work her will; the priestess, calling loud,
 Gathers the Trojans to her mountain-shrine.

Deep in the face of that Euboean crag
 A cavern vast is hollowed out amain,
 With hundred openings, a hundred mouths,
 Whence voices flow, the Sibyl's answering songs.
 While at the door they paused, the virgin cried:
 "Ask now thy doom!—the god! the god is nigh!"
 So saying, from her face its color flew,
 Her twisted locks flowed free, the heaving breast
 Swelled with her heart's wild blood; her stature seemed
 Vaster, her accent more than mortal man,
 As all th' oncoming god around her breathed:
 "On with thy vows and prayers, O Trojan, on!
 For only unto prayer this haunted cave
 May its vast lips uncloze." She spake no more.
 An icy shudder through the marrow ran
 Of the bold Trojans; while their sacred King

6.42

 FOUND IT

A hundred mouths. Here is the cave exactly as the story gave it — *centum ostia*, "a hundred openings" (6.43). Add your own mark.

Poured from his inmost soul this plaint and prayer:

“Phoebus, who ever for the woes of Troy
 Hadst pitying eyes! who gavest deadly aim
 To Paris when his Dardan shaft he hurled
 On great Achilles! Thou hast guided me
 Through many an unknown water, where the seas
 Break upon kingdoms vast, and to the tribes
 Of the remote Massyli, whose wild land
 To Syrtes spreads. But now; because at last
 I touch Hesperia's ever-fleeting bound,
 May Troy's ill fate forsake me from this day!
 O gods and goddesses, beneath whose wrath
 Dardania's glory and great Ilium stood,
 Spare, for ye may, the remnant of my race!
 And thou, most holy prophetess, whose soul
 Foreknows events to come, grant to my prayer
 (Which asks no kingdom save what Fate decrees)
 That I may stablish in the Latin land
 My Trojans, my far-wandering household-gods,
 And storm-tossed deities of fallen Troy.
 Then unto Phoebus and his sister pale
 A temple all of marble shall be given,
 And festal days to Phoebus evermore.
 Thee also in my realms a spacious shrine
 Shall honor; thy dark books and holy songs
 I there will keep, to be my people's law;
 And thee, benignant Sibyl for all time
 A company of chosen priests shall serve.
 O, not on leaves, light leaves, inscribe thy songs!
 Lest, playthings of each breeze, they fly afar
 In swift confusion! Sing thyself, I pray.”
 So ceased his voice; the virgin through the cave,
 Scarce bridled yet by Phoebus' hand divine,
 Ecstatic swept along, and vainly strove
 To fling its potent master from her breast;
 But he more strongly plied his rein and curb
 Upon her frenzied lips, and soon subdued
 Her spirit fierce, and swayed her at his will.
 Free and self-moved the cavern's hundred doors
 Swung open wide, and uttered to the air
 The oracles the virgin-priestess sung:
 “Thy long sea-perils thou hast safely passed;

Hesperia “the western land”: the
 Greeks' name for Italy

But heavier woes await thee on the land.
 Truly thy Trojans to Lavinian shore
 Shall come—vex not thyself thereon—but, oh!
 Shall rue their coming thither! war, red war!
 And Tiber stained with bloody foam I see.
 Simois, Xanthus, and the Dorian horde
 Thou shalt behold; a new Achilles now
 In Latium breathes,—he, too, of goddess born;
 And Juno, burden of the sons of Troy,
 Will vex them ever; while thyself shalt sue
 In dire distress to many a town and tribe
 Through Italy; the cause of so much ill
 Again shall be a hostess-queen, again
 A marriage-chamber for an alien bride.
 Oh! yield not to thy woe, but front it ever,
 And follow boldly whither Fortune calls.
 Thy way of safety, as thou least couldst dream,
 Lies through a city of the Greeks, thy foes.”

Thus from her shrine Cumaea's prophetess
 Chanted the dark decrees; the dreadful sound
 Reverberated through the bellowing cave,
 Commingling truth with ecstasies obscure.
 Apollo, as she raged, flung loosened rein,
 And thrust beneath her heart a quickening spur.
 When first her madness ceased, and her wild lips
 Were still at last, the hero thus began:
 “No tribulations new, O Sibyl blest,
 Can now confront me; every future pain
 I have foretasted; my prophetic soul
 Endured each stroke of fate before it fell.
 One boon I ask. If of th' infernal King
 This be the portal where the murky wave
 Of swollen Acheron o'erflows its bound,
 Here let me enter and behold the face
 Of my loved sire. Thy hand may point the way;
 Thy word will open wide yon holy doors.
 My father through the flames and falling spears,
 Straight through the centre of our foes, I bore
 Upon these shoulders. My long flight he shared
 From sea to sea, and suffered at my side
 The anger of rude waters and dark skies,—
 Though weak—O task too great for old and gray!

*Tu ne cede malis, sed contra audentior
 ito. — 6.95*

“Yield not thou to evils, but go the bolder against them.” A maxim to underline.

6.98

Orpheus the singer who went down alive for his wife Eurydice — and lost her at the last step. Watch how often this poem remembers those who went down before.

Alcides Hercules, named from his grandfather Alceus; he dragged the watchdog of hell up into daylight

Acheron a river of the dead

Thus as a suppliant at thy door to stand,
 Was his behest and prayer. On son and sire,
 O gracious one, have pity,—for thy rule
 Is over all; no vain authority
 Hadst thou from Trivia o'er th' Avernian groves.
 If Orpheus could call back his loved one's shade,
 Emboldened by the lyre's melodious string:
 If Pollux by the interchange of death
 Redeemed his twin, and oft repassed the way:
 If Theseus—but why name him? why recall
 Alcides' task? I, too, am sprung from Jove.”

Thus, to the altar clinging, did he pray:
 The Sibyl thus replied: “Offspring of Heaven,
 Anchises' son, the downward path to death
 Is easy; all the livelong night and day
 Dark Pluto's door stands open for a guest.
 But O! remounting to the world of light,
 This is a task indeed, a strife supreme.
 Few, very few, whom righteous Jove did bless,
 Or quenchless virtue carried to the stars,
 Children of gods, have such a victory won.
 Grim forests stop the way, and, gliding slow,
 Cocytus circles through the sightless gloom.
 But if it be thy dream and fond desire
 Twice o'er the Stygian gulf to travel, twice
 On glooms of Tartarus to set thine eyes,
 If such mad quest be now thy pleasure—hear
 What must be first fulfilled. A certain tree
 Hides in obscurest shade a golden bough,
 Of pliant stems and many a leaf of gold,
 Sacred to Proserpine, infernal Queen.
 Far in the grove it hides; in sunless vale
 Deep shadows keep it in captivity.
 No pilgrim to that underworld can pass
 But he who plucks this burgeoned, leafy gold;
 For this hath beauteous Proserpine ordained
 Her chosen gift to be. Whene'er it is culled,
 A branch out-leafing in like golden gleam,
 A second wonder-stem, fails not to spring.
 Therefore go seek it with uplifted eyes!
 And when by will of Heaven thou findest it,
 Reach forth and pluck; for at a touch it yields,

6.124

*Facilis descensus Averno; ... sed revocare
 gradum superasque evadere ad auras,
 hoc opus, hic labor est. — 6.126–129*

“Easy is the descent to Avernus ... but
 to recall the step and escape to upper
 air — this is the task, this the toil.”
 Mark this line well: the program will
 return to it.

the Golden Bough the branch sacred
 to Proserpine, queen of the dead —
 the one pass into the deep that
 permits a return

Cocytus “the river of wailing”

A free and willing gift, if Fate ordain;
But otherwise no mortal strength avails,
Nor strong, sharp steel, to rend it from the tree.
Another task awaits; thy friend's cold clay
Lies unentombed. Alas! thou art not ware
(While in my house thou lingerest, seeking light)
That all thy ships are by his death defiled.
Unto his resting-place and sepulchre,
Go, carry him! And sable victims bring,
In expiation, to his mournful shade.
So at the last on yonder Stygian groves,
And realms to things that breathe impassable,
Thine eye shall gaze." So closed her lips inspired.

VISIT II · WEEKS 3 AND 4

The Golden Bough — Aeneid 6.156–425

Before the descent, a death: the trumpeter Misenus lies drowned on the beach, and the bough will not be found until he is buried. Then the doves of Venus lead Aeneas to the gold, the Sibyl makes the midnight sacrifice, and the ground opens. Past the miseries at the door and the shapes of old terror, they come down to the river, to Charon, to the crowd of the unburied dead — and to Palinurus the helmsman, begging for a grave.

Aeneas then drew forth, with downcast eyes,
 From that dark cavern, pondering in his heart
 The riddle of his fate. His faithful friend
 Achates at his side, with paces slow,
 Companioned all his care, while their sad souls
 Made mutual and oft-renewed surmise
 What comrade dead, what cold and tombless clay,
 The Sibyl's word would show.
 But as they mused,
 Behold Misenus on the dry sea-sands,
 By hasty hand of death struck guiltless down!
 A son of Aeolus, none better knew
 To waken heroes by the clarion's call,
 With war-enkindling sound. Great Hector's friend
 In happier days, he oft at Hector's side
 Strode to the fight with glittering lance and horn.
 But when Achilles stripped his fallen foe,
 This dauntless hero to Aeneas gave
 Allegiance true, in not less noble cause.
 But, on a day, he chanced beside the sea
 To blow his shell-shaped horn, and wildly dared
 Challenge the gods themselves to rival song;
 Till jealous Triton, if the tale be true,
 Grasped the rash mortal, and out-flung him far
 'mid surf-beat rocks and waves of whirling foam.
 Now from all sides, with tumult and loud cry,
 The Trojans came,—Aeneas leading all
 In faithful grief; they hasten to fulfil
 The Sibyl's mandate, and with many a tear
 Build, altar-wise, a pyre, of tree on tree
 Heaped high as heaven: then they penetrate

6.156

Misenus Aeneas's trumpeter, son of Aeolus — a Trojan, not the king of the winds