Vergil’s *Aeneid*, Book VI

For the rest of this book and a complete translation of the whole poem see [http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/Virgilhome.htm](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/Virgilhome.htm)

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In the first part of Book VI, Aeneas goes to the Sibyl and asks him to take her to the underworld. There, he meets his old flame Dido and a friend from Troy. Then, the Sibyl describes the layout of the underworld.

**BkVI:535-627 The Sibyl Describes Tartarus**

While they spoke Aurora and her rosy chariot had passed the zenith of her ethereal path, and they might perhaps have spent all the time allowed in such talk, but the Sibyl, his companion, warned him briefly saying: ‘Night approaches, Aeneas: we waste the hours with weeping. This is the place where the path splits itself in two: there on the right is our road to Elysium, that runs beneath the walls of mighty Dis: but the left works punishment on the wicked, and sends them on to godless Tartarus.’ Deiophobus replied: ‘Do not be angry, great priestess: I will leave: I will make up the numbers, and return to the darkness. Go now glory of our race: enjoy a better fate.’ So he spoke, and in speaking turned away. Aeneas suddenly looked back, and, below the left hand cliff, he saw wide battlements, surrounded by a triple wall, and encircled by a swift river of red-hot flames, the Tartarean Phlegethon, churning with echoing rocks. A gate fronts it, vast, with pillars of solid steel, that no human force, not the heavenly gods themselves, can overturn by war: an iron tower rises into the air, and seated before it, Tisiphone, clothed in a blood-wet dress, keeps guard of the doorway, sleeplessly, night and day. Groans came from there, and the cruel sound of the lash, then the clank of iron, and dragging chains. Aeneas halted, and stood rooted, terrified by the noise. ‘What evil is practised here? O Virgin, tell me: by what torments are they oppressed? Why are there such sounds in the air?’
Then the prophetess began to speak as follows: ‘Famous leader of the Trojans, it is forbidden for the pure to cross the evil threshold; but when Hecate appointed me to the wood of Avernus, she taught me the divine torments, and guided me through them all. Cretan Rhadamanthus rules this harshest of kingdoms, and hears their guilt, extracts confessions, and punishes whoever has deferred atonement for their sins too long till death, delighting in useless concealment, in the world above. Tisiphone the avenger, armed with her whip, leaps on the guilty immediately, lashes them, and threatening them with the fierce snakes in her left hand, calls to her savage troop of sisters. Then at last the accursed doors open, screeching on jarring hinges. You comprehend what guardian sits at the door, what shape watches the threshold? Well still fiercer is the monstrous Hydra inside, with her fifty black gaping jaws. There Tartarus itself falls sheer, and stretches down into the darkness: twice as far as we gaze upwards to heavenly Olympus. Here the Titanic race, the ancient sons of Earth, hurled down by the lightning-bolt, writhe in the depths. And here I saw the two sons of Aloeus, giant forms, who tried to tear down the heavens with their hands, and topple Jupiter from his high kingdom. And I saw Salmoneus paying a savage penalty for imitating Jove’s lightning, and the Olympian thunder. Brandishing a torch, and drawn by four horses he rode in triumph among the Greeks, through Elis’s city, claiming the gods’ honours as his own, a fool, who mimicked the storm-clouds and the inimitable thunderbolt with bronze cymbals and the sound of horses’ hoof-beats. But the all-powerful father hurled his lighting from dense cloud, not for him fiery torches, or pine-branches’ smoky light and drove him headlong with the mighty whirlwind. And Tityus was to be seen as well, the foster-child of Earth, our universal mother, whose body stretches over nine acres, and a great vulture with hooked beak feeds on his indestructible liver, and his entrails ripe for punishment, lodged deep inside the chest, grooping for his feast, no respite given to the ever-renewing tissue. Shall I speak of the Lapiths, Ixion, Pirithous, over whom hangs a dark crag that seems to slip and fall?"
High couches for their feast gleam with golden frames, 
and a banquet of royal luxury is spread before their eyes: 
nearby the eldest Fury, crouching, prevents their fingers touching 
the table: rising up, and brandishing her torch, with a voice of thunder. 
Here are those who hated their brothers, in life, 
or struck a parent, or contrived to defraud a client, 
or who crouched alone over the riches they’d made, 
without setting any aside for their kin (their crowd is largest), 
those who were killed for adultery, or pursued civil war, 
not fearing to break their pledges to their masters: 
shut in they see their punishment. Don’t ask to know 
that punishment, or what kind of suffering drowns them. 
Some roll huge stones, or hang spread-eagled 
on wheel-spokes: wretched Theseus sits still, and will sit 
for eternity: Phlegyas, the most unfortunate, warns them all 
and bears witness in a loud voice among the shades: 
“Learn justice: be warned, and don’t despise the gods.” 
Here’s one who sold his country for gold, and set up 
a despotic lord: this one made law and remade it for a price: 
he entered his daughter’s bed and a forbidden marriage: 
all of them dared monstrous sin, and did what they dared. 
Not if I had a hundred tongues, a hundred mouths, 
a voice of iron, could I tell all the forms of wickedness 
or spell out the names of every torment.’

BkVI:628-678 The Fields of Elysium

When she had spoken of this, the aged priestess of Apollo said: 
‘But come now, travel the road, and complete the task set for you: 
let us hurry, I see the battlements that were forged 
in the Cyclopean fires, and the gates in the arch opposite us 
where we are told to set down the gifts as ordered.’ 
She spoke and keeping step they hastened along the dark path 
crossing the space between and arriving near the doors. 
Aeneas gained the entrance, sprinkled fresh water 
over his body, and set up the branch on the threshold before him. 
Having at last achieved this, the goddess’s task fulfilled, 
they came to the pleasant places, the delightful grassy turf 
of the Fortunate Groves, and the homes of the blessed. 
Here freer air and radiant light clothe the plain,
and these have their own sun, and their own stars. Some exercise their bodies in a grassy gymnasium, compete in sports and wrestle on the yellow sand: others tread out the steps of a dance, and sing songs. There Orpheus too, the long-robed priest of Thrace, accompanies their voices with the seven-note scale, playing now with fingers, now with the ivory quill. Here are Teucer’s ancient people, loveliest of children, great-hearted heroes, born in happier years, Ilus, Assaracus, and Dardanus founder of Troy. Aeneas marvels from a distance at their idle chariots and their weapons: their spears fixed in the ground, and their horses scattered freely browsing over the plain: the pleasure they took in chariots and armour while alive, the care in tending shining horses, follows them below the earth. Look, he sees others on the grass to right and left, feasting, and singing a joyful paean in chorus, among the fragrant groves of laurel, out of which the Eridanus’s broad river flows through the woodlands to the world above. Here is the company of those who suffered wounds fighting for their country: and those who were pure priests, while they lived, and those who were faithful poets, singers worthy of Apollo, and those who improved life, with discoveries in Art or Science, and those who by merit caused others to remember them: the brows of all these were bound with white headbands. As they crowded round, the Sibyl addressed them, Musaeus above all: since he holds the centre of the vast crowd, all looking up to him, his tall shoulders towering above: ‘Blessed spirits, and you, greatest of Poets, say what region or place contains Anchises. We have come here, crossing the great rivers of Erebus, for him.’ And the hero replied to her briefly in these words: ‘None of us have a fixed abode: we live in the shadowy woods, and make couches of river-banks, and inhabit fresh-water meadows. But climb this ridge, if your hearts-wish so inclines, and I will soon set you on an easy path.’ He spoke and went on before them, and showed them the bright plains below: then they left the mountain heights.
BkVI:679-702 The Meeting with Anchises

But deep in a green valley his father Anchises
was surveying the spirits enclosed there, destined
for the light above, thinking carefully, and was reviewing
as it chanced the numbers of his own folk, his dear grandsons,
and their fate and fortunes as men, and their ways and works.
And when he saw Aeneas heading towards him over the grass
he stretched out both his hands eagerly, his face
streaming with tears, and a cry issued from his lips:
‘Have you come at last, and has the loyalty your father expected
conquered the harsh road? Is it granted me to see your face,
my son, and hear and speak in familiar tones?
I calculated it in my mind, and thought it would be so,
counting off the hours, nor has my trouble failed me.
From travel over what lands and seas, do I receive you!
What dangers have hurled you about, my son!
How I feared the realms of Libya might harm you!’
He answered: ‘Father, your image, yours, appearing to me
so often, drove me to reach this threshold:
My ships ride the Etruscan waves. Father, let me clasp
your hand, let me, and do not draw away from my
embrace.’
So speaking, his face was also drowned in a flood of tears.
Three times he tries to throw his arms round his father’s neck,
three times, clasped in vain, that semblance slips though his hands,
like the light breeze, most of all like a winged dream.

BkVI:703-723 The Souls Due for Re-birth

And now Aeneas saw a secluded grove
in a receding valley, with rustling woodland thickets,
and the river of Lethe gliding past those peaceful places.
Innumerable tribes and peoples hovered round it:
just as, in the meadows, on a cloudless summer’s day,
the bees settle on the multifarious flowers, and stream
round the bright lilies, and all the fields hum with their buzzing.
Aeneas was thrilled by the sudden sight, and, in ignorance,
asked the cause: what the river is in the distance,
who the men are crowding the banks in such numbers.
Then his father Anchises answered: ‘They are spirits,
owed a second body by destiny, and they drink
the happy waters, and a last forgetting, at Lethe’s stream.
Indeed, for a long time I’ve wished to tell you of them,
and show you them face to face, to enumerate my children’s
descendants, so you might joy with me more at finding Italy.’
‘O father, is it to be thought that any spirits go from here
to the sky above, returning again to dull matter?’
‘Indeed I’ll tell you, son, not keep you in doubt,’
Anchises answered, and revealed each thing in order.

BkVI:724-751 The Transmigration of Souls

‘Firstly, a spirit within them nourishes the sky and earth,
the watery plains, the shining orb of the moon,
and Titan’s star, and Mind, flowing through matter,
vivifies the whole mass, and mingles with its vast frame.
From it come the species of man and beast, and winged lives,
and the monsters the sea contains beneath its marbled waves.
The power of those seeds is fiery, and their origin divine,
so long as harmful matter doesn’t impede them
and terrestrial bodies and mortal limbs don’t dull them.
Through those they fear and desire, and grieve and joy,
and enclosed in night and a dark dungeon, can’t see the light.
Why, when life leaves them at the final hour,
still all of the evil, all the plagues of the flesh, alas,
have not completely vanished, and many things, long hardened
deep within, must of necessity be ingrained, in strange ways.
So they are scourged by torments, and pay the price
for former sins: some are hung, stretched out,
to the hollow winds, the taint of wickedness is cleansed
for others in vast gulfs, or burned away with fire:
each spirit suffers its own: then we are sent
through wide Elysium, and we few stay in the joyous fields,
for a length of days, till the cycle of time,
complete, removes the hardened stain, and leaves
pure ethereal thought, and the brightness of natural air.
All these others the god calls in a great crowd to the river Lethe,
after they have turned the wheel for a thousand years,
so that, truly forgetting, they can revisit the vault above,
and begin with a desire to return to the flesh.’
BkVI:752-776 The Future Race – The Alban Kings

Anchises had spoken, and he drew the Sibyl and his son, both together, into the middle of the gathering and the murmuring crowd, and chose a hill from which he could see all the long ranks opposite, and watch their faces as they came by him.

‘Come, I will now explain what glory will pursue the children of Dardanus, what descendants await you of the Italian race, illustrious spirits to march onwards in our name, and I will teach you your destiny. See that boy, who leans on a headless spear, he is fated to hold a place nearest the light, first to rise to the upper air, sharing Italian blood, Silvius, of Alban name, your last-born son, who your wife Lavinia, late in your old age, will give birth to in the wood, a king and the father of kings, through whom our race will rule in Alba Longa.

Next to him is Procas, glory of the Trojan people, and Capys and Numitor, and he who’ll revive your name, Silvius Aeneas, outstanding like you in virtue and arms, if he might at last achieve the Alban throne.

What men! See what authority they display, their foreheads shaded by the civic oak-leaf crown!

They will build Nomentum, Gabii, and Fidenae’s city: Collatia’s fortress in the hills, Pometii and the Fort of Inus, and Bola, and Cora.

Those will be names that are now nameless land.

BkVI:777-807 The Future Race – Romulus and the Caesars

Yes, and a child of Mars will join his grandfather to accompany him, Romulus, whom his mother Ilia will bear, of Assaracus’s line. See how Mars’s twin plumes stand on his crest, and his father marks him out for the world above with his own emblems?

Behold, my son, under his command glorious Rome will match earth’s power and heaven’s will, and encircle seven hills with a single wall, happy in her race of men: as Cybele, the Berecynthian ‘Great Mother’, crowned with turrets, rides through the Phrygian cities, delighting in her divine children, clasping a hundred descendants, all gods, all dwelling in the heights above.
Now direct your eyes here, gaze at this people, your own Romans. Here is Caesar, and all the offspring of Iulus destined to live under the pole of heaven. This is the man, this is him, whom you so often hear promised you, Augustus Caesar, son of the Deified, who will make a Golden Age again in the fields where Saturn once reigned, and extend the empire beyond the Libyans and the Indians (to a land that lies outside the zodiac’s belt, beyond the sun’s ecliptic and the year’s, where sky-carrying Atlas turns the sphere, inset with gleaming stars, on his shoulders):

Even now the Caspian realms, and Maeotian earth, tremble at divine prophecies of his coming, and the restless mouths of the seven-branched Nile are troubled. Truly, Hercules never crossed so much of the earth, though he shot the bronze-footed Arcadian deer, brought peace to the woods of Erymanthus, made Lerna tremble at his bow: nor did Bacchus, who steers his chariot, in triumph, with reins made of vines, guiding his tigers down from Nysa’s high peak. Do we really hesitate still to extend our power by our actions, and does fear prevent us settling the Italian lands?

**BkVI:808-853 The Future Race – Republic and Beyond**

Who is he, though, over there, distinguished by his olive branches, carrying offerings? I know the hair and the white-bearded chin of a king of Rome, Numa, called to supreme authority from little Cures’s poverty-stricken earth, who will secure our first city under the rule of law. Then Tullus will succeed him who will shatter the country’s peace, and call to arms sedentary men, ranks now unused to triumphs. The over-boastful Ancus follows him closely, delighting too much even now in the people’s opinion. Will you look too at Tarquin’s dynasty, and the proud spirit of Brutus the avenger, the rods of office reclaimed? He’ll be the first to win a consul’s powers and the savage axes, and when the sons foment a new civil war, the father will call them to account, for lovely freedom’s sake: ah, to be pitied, whatever posterity says of his actions: his love of country will prevail, and great appetite for glory. Ah, see over there, the Decii and Drusi, and Torquatus
brutal with the axe, and Camillus rescuing the standards.
But those others, you can discern, shining in matching armour,
souls in harmony now, while they are cloaked in darkness,
ah, if they reach the light of the living, what civil war
what battle and slaughter, they’ll cause, Julius Caesar,
the father-in-law, down from the Alpine ramparts, from the fortress
of Monoecus: Pompey, the son-in-law, opposing with Eastern forces.
My sons, don’t inure your spirits to such wars,
ever turn the powerful forces of your country on itself:
You be the first to halt, you, who derive your race from heaven:
hurl the sword from your hand, who are of my blood!
There’s Mummius: triumphing over Corinth, he’ll drive his chariot,
victorious, to the high Capitol, famed for the Greeks he’s killed:
and Aemilius Paulus, who, avenging his Trojan ancestors, and Minerva’s
desecrated shrine, will destroy Agamemnon’s Mycenae, and Argos,
and Perseus the Aeacid himself, descendant of war-mighty Achilles.
Who would pass over you in silence, great Cato, or you Cossus,
or the Gracchus’s race, or the two Scipios, war’s lightning bolts,
the scourges of Libya, or you Fabricius, powerful in poverty,
or you, Regulus Serranus, sowing your furrow with seed?
Fabii, where do you hurry my weary steps? You, Fabius
Maximus, the Delayer, are he who alone renew our State.
Others (I can well believe) will hammer out bronze that breathes
with more delicacy than us, draw out living features
from the marble: plead their causes better, trace with instruments
the movement of the skies, and tell the rising of the constellations:
remember, Roman, it is for you to rule the nations with your power,
(that will be your skill) to crown peace with law,
to spare the conquered, and subdue the proud.’

BkVI:854-885 The Future Race – Marcellus

So father Anchises spoke, and while they marvelled, added:
‘See, how Claudius Marcellus, distinguished by the Supreme Prize,
comes forward, and towers, victorious, over other men.
As a knight, he’ll support the Roman State, turbulent
with fierce confusion, strike the Cathaginians and rebellious Gauls,
and dedicate captured weapons, a third time, to father Quirinus.’
And, at this, Aeneas said (since he saw a youth of outstanding
beauty with shining armour, walking with Marcellus,
but his face lacking in joy, and his eyes downcast):
‘Father, who is this who accompanies him on his way?
His son: or another of his long line of descendants?
What murmuring round them! What presence he has!
But dark night, with its sad shadows, hovers round his head.’
Then his father Aeneas, with welling tears, replied:
‘O, do not ask about your people’s great sorrow, my son.
The Fates will only show him to the world, not allow him
to stay longer. The Roman people would seem
too powerful to you gods, if this gift were lasting.
What mourning from mankind that Field of Mars will
deliver to the mighty city! And what funeral processions
you, Tiber, will see, as you glide past his new-made tomb!
No boy of the line of Ilius shall so exalt his Latin ancestors by his show of promise, nor will Romulus’s land ever take more pride in one of its sons.
Alas for virtue, alas for the honour of ancient times,
and a hand invincible in war! No one might have attacked him safely when armed, whether he met the enemy on foot,
or dug his spurs into the flank of his foaming charger.
Ah, boy to be pitied, if only you may shatter harsh fate,
you’ll be a Marcellus! Give me handfuls of white lilies,
let me scatter radiant flowers, let me load my scion’s spirit
with those gifts at least, in discharging that poor duty.’

BkVI:886-901 The Gates of Sleep

So they wander here and there through the whole region,
over the wide airy plain, and gaze at everything.
And when Anchises has led his son through each place,
and inflamed his spirit with love of the glory that is to come,
he tells him then of the wars he must soon fight,
and teaches him about the Laurentine peoples,
and the city of Latinus, and how to avoid or face each trial.
There are two gates of Sleep: one of which is said to be of horn,
through which an easy passage is given to true shades, the other
gleams with the whiteness of polished ivory, but through it the Gods of the Dead send false dreams to the world above.
After his words, Anchises accompanies his son there, and,
frees him, together with the Sibyl, through the ivory gate.
Aeneas makes his way to the ships and rejoins his friends: then coasts straight to Caieta’s harbour along the shore. The anchors are thrown from the prows: on the shore the sterns rest.

**End of Book VI**