

A summary of 1600 lines of poetry in under 3000 words:

Virgil begins the second half of his epic with another 'proem' or introduction. Aeneas has finally reached Italy and his visit to his father in the Underworld has given him determination and certainty which he did not have before. He now knows how great the Roman race is fated to be. He knows he is the 'proto-Roman'. The question in the second half of the poem is whether or not he accepts it.

You can use Perseus to look up the words, click on the words to get the definition:

<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0055%3ABook%3D7%3Acard%3D37>

Nunc age, qui reges, Erato, quae tempora, rerum

quis Latio antiquo fuerit status, advena classem

cum primum Ausoniis exercitus appulit oris,

expediam, et primae revocabo exordia pugnae. 40

tu vatem, tu, diva, mone. dicam horrida bella,

dicam acies actosque animis in funera reges,

Tyrrhenamque manum totamque sub arma coactam

Hesperiam. maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo,

maius opus moveo.

Aeneas meets King Latinus, king of the Latins and Latium. Latinus has had a prophecy that his daughter Lavinia should marry a foreigner. He receives Aeneas peacefully, and it looks like an alliance will easily be made, but Juno is never far away, scheming and planning the destruction of the Trojans.

*But behold, the ferocious wife of Jove returning
from Inachus's Argos, winging her airy way,
saw the delighted Aeneas and his Trojan fleet,
from the distant sky, beyond Sicilian Pachynus.
She gazed at them, already building houses, already confident
in their land, the ships deserted: she halted pierced by a bitter pang.
Then shaking her head, she poured these words from her breast:
'Ah loathsome tribe, and Trojan destiny, opposed to my
own destiny! Could they not have fallen on the Sigean plains,
could they not have been held as captives? Could burning Troy
not have consumed these men? They find a way through
the heart of armies and flames. And I think my powers must
be exhausted at last, or I have come to rest, my anger sated...
... I accept it's not granted to me to withhold the Latin kingdom,
and by destiny Lavinia will still, unalterably, be his bride:
but I can draw such things out and add delays,
and I can destroy the people of these two kings.
Let father and son-in-law unite at the cost of their nations' lives:
virgin, your dowry will be Rutulian and Trojan blood,
and Bellona, the goddess of war, waits to attend your marriage.
Nor was it Hecuba, Cisseus's daughter, alone who was pregnant
with a fire-brand, or gave birth to nuptial flames.
Why, Venus is alike in her child, another Paris,
another funeral torch for a resurrected Troy.'*

*When she had spoken these words, fearsome, she sought the earth:
and summoned Allecto, the grief-bringer, from the house
of the Fatal Furies, from the infernal shadows: in whose
mind are sad wars, angers and deceits, and guilty crimes.*

*A monster, hated by her own father Pluto, hateful
to her Tartarean sisters: she assumes so many forms,
her features are so savage, she sports so many black vipers.
Juno roused her with these words, saying:
'Grant me a favour of my own, virgin daughter of Night,
this service, so that my honour and glory are not weakened,
and give way, and the people of Aeneas cannot woo
Latinus with intermarriage, or fill the bounds of Italy.
You've the power to rouse brothers, who are one, to conflict,
and overturn homes with hatred: you bring the scourge
and the funeral torch into the house: you've a thousand names,
and a thousand noxious arts. Search your fertile breast,
shatter the peace accord, sow accusations of war:
let men in a moment need, demand and seize their weapons.'*

Allecto first goes down to Amata, Latinus' wife, and sends her mad. Amata now opposes the marriage alliance between Aeneas and Lavinia. She snatches her daughter and whisks her away to the mountains with all the other women of Latium.

Allecto now moves on to Turnus, the Rutulian prince (a local tribe) who had been betrothed to Lavinia until Latinus got the omen about the foreigner. Turnus is going to feature A LOT in Book 10 and Book 12.

*Turnus was now in a deep sleep, in his high palace.
Allecto changed her fierce appearance and fearful shape,
transformed her looks into those of an old woman,
furrowed her ominous brow with wrinkles, assumed
white hair and sacred ribbon, then twined an olive spray there:
she became Calybe, Juno's old servant, and priestess of her temple,
and offered herself to the young man's eyes with these words:
'Turnus, will you see all your efforts wasted in vain,
and your sceptre handed over to Trojan settlers?
The king denies you your bride and the dowry looked for
by your race, and a stranger is sought as heir to the throne.*

*Go then, be despised, offer yourself, un-thanked, to danger:
go, cut down the Tuscan ranks, protect the Latins with peace!
This that I now say to you, as you lie there in the calm of night,
Saturn's all-powerful daughter herself ordered me to speak openly.
So rise, and ready your men, gladly, to arm and march
from the gates to the fields, and set fire to the painted ships
anchored in our noble river, and the Trojan leaders with them.
The vast power of the gods demands it. Let King Latinus
himself feel it, unless he agrees to keep his word and give you
your bride, and let him at last experience Turnus armed.'*

*At this the warrior, mocking the priestess, opened his mouth in turn:
'The news that a fleet has entered Tiber's waters
has not escaped my notice, as you think:
don't imagine it's so great a fear to me.
Nor is Queen Juno unmindful of me.
But you, O mother, old age, conquered by weakness
and devoid of truth, troubles with idle cares, and mocks
a prophetess, amidst the wars of kings, with imaginary terrors.
Your duty's to guard the gods' statues and their temples:
men will make war and peace, by whom war's to be made.'*

Virgil's description of Allecto's response to these words and the effect she has on Turnus is vital to your understanding of Turnus' character as a whole. It's great stuff!

Perseus link for vocab:

<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0055%3Abook%3D7%3Acard%3D445>

Talibus Allecto dictis exarsit in iras. 445
at iuveni oranti subitus tremor occupat artus,
deriguere oculi: tot Erinys sibilat hydris
tantaque se facies aperit; tum flammea torquens
lumina cunctantem et quaerentem dicere plura
reppulit, et geminos erexit crinibus anguis, 450
verberaque insonuit rabidoque haec addidit ore:
'en ego victa situ, quam veri effeta senectus
arma inter regum falsa formidine ludit.
respice ad haec: adsum dirarum ab sede sororum,
bella manu letumque gero.' 455
sic effata facem iuveni coniecit et atro
lumine fumantis fixit sub pectore taedas.
olli somnum ingens rumpit pavor, ossaque et artus
perfundit toto proruptus corpore sudor.
arma amens fremit, arma toro tectisque requirit; 460
saevit amor ferri et scelerata insania belli,
ira super ...

*So, violating the peace, he commanded his young leaders
to march against King Latinus, and ordered the troops to be readied,
to defend Italy, to drive the enemy from her borders:
his approach itself would be enough for both Trojans and Latins.
When he gave the word, and called the gods to witness his vows,
the Rutuli vied in urging each other to arm.
This man is moved by Turnus's youth and outstanding nobility
of form, that by his royal line, this one again by his glorious deeds.*

Allecto now has to drive the Latins to fight against the Trojans. She does this using a tame deer and an unfortunate act by Ascanius when out hunting. So essentially, Bambi starts the war ...

*While Turnus was rousing the Rutulians with fiery courage,
Allecto hurled herself towards the Trojans, on Stygian wings,
spying out, with fresh cunning, the place on the shore
where handsome Iulus was hunting wild beasts on foot with nets.
Hades's Virgin drove his hounds to sudden frenzy,
touching their muzzles with a familiar scent,
so that they eagerly chased down a stag: this was a prime
cause of trouble, rousing the spirits of the countrymen to war.
There was a stag of outstanding beauty, with huge antlers,
that, torn from its mother's teats, Tyrrhus and his sons had raised,
the father being the man to whom the king's herds submitted,
and who was trusted with managing his lands far and wide.
Silvia, their sister, training it to her commands with great care,
adorned its antlers, twining them with soft garlands, grooming
the wild creature, and bathing it in a clear spring. Tame to the hand,
and used to food from the master's table, it wandered the woods,
and returned to the familiar threshold, by itself, however late at night.
Now while it strayed far a-field, Iulus the huntsman's
frenzied hounds started it, by chance, as it moved
downstream, escaping the heat by the grassy banks.
Iulus himself inflamed also with desire for high
honours, aimed an arrow from his curved bow,
the goddess unfailingly guiding his errant hand,
and the shaft, flying with a loud hiss, pierced flank and belly.*

*But the wounded creature fleeing to its familiar home,
dragged itself groaning to its stall, and, bleeding, filled
the house with its cries, like a person begging for help.*

*Silvia, the sister, beating her arms with her hands in distress, was
the first to call for help, summoning the tough countrymen...*

The Latin countrymen take up weapons, and in response to this, so do the Trojans. The first shot is fired and the peace is broken.

*Then the rough countrymen snatching up their weapons, gathered
more quickly, and from every side, to the noise with which
that dread trumpet sounded the call, nor were the Trojan
youth slow to open their camp, and send out help to Ascanius.*

*The lines were deployed. They no longer competed
with solid staffs, and fire-hardened stakes, in a rustic quarrel,
but fought it out with double-edged blades, and a dark crop
of naked swords bristled far and wide: bronze shone
struck by the sun, and hurled its light up to the clouds:
as when a wave begins to whiten at the wind's first breath,
and the sea swells little by little, and raises higher waves,
then surges to heaven out of its profoundest depths.*

*Here young Almo, in the front ranks, the eldest
of Tyrrhus's sons, was downed by a hissing arrow:
the wound opened beneath his throat, choking the passage
of liquid speech, and failing breath, with blood.*

The rest of Book 7: Latinus abdicates all responsibility and leadership. He shuts himself away in his palace. Turnus is now in charge. The two forces assemble their armies.

Book 8 – a brief summary. Aeneas is visited by the river god Tiber, who tells him to seek an alliance with King Evander and the Arcadians, who live in a place called Pallanteum (this will become the future site of Rome). Evander is willing to form this alliance but is too old to fight himself, so he sends instead his young son Pallas, as a sort of apprentice hero, with Aeneas as his mentor. You can probably tell from the farewell speech he gives to his son, that this is not going to end well ...

*Then old Evander, clasping his son's hand as he departed,
clung to him weeping incessantly and spoke as follows:
'O, if Jupiter would bring back the years that have vanished,
I to be as I was when I felled the foremost ranks under Praeneste's
very walls, and as victor heaped up the shields,
and sent King Erulus down to Tartarus, by this right hand,
he to whom at his birth his mother Feronia (strange to tell)
gave three lives, triple weapons to wield – to be three times
brought low in death: who at last in a moment this right hand
stripped of all his lives, and equally of all his weapons:
I would never be torn as now from your sweet embrace, my son,
never would Mezentius have poured insults on
this neighbour's head, caused so many cruel deaths
with the sword, or widowed the city of so many of her sons.
But you, powers above, and you, Jupiter, mighty ruler of the gods,
take pity I beg you on this Arcadian king, and hear
a father's prayer. If your will, and fate, keep my Pallas safe,
if I live to see him and be together with him, I ask for life:
I have the patience to endure any hardship.
But if you threaten any unbearable disaster, Fortune,
now, oh now, let me break the thread of cruel existence,
while fear hangs in doubt, while hope's uncertain of the future.
while you, beloved boy, my late and only joy, are held
in my embrace, and let no evil news wound my ears.'*

*These were the words the father poured out at their last parting:
then his servants carried him, overcome, into the palace.*

Oh and one more thing – and this is important for Book 10: Evander advises Aeneas to approach the Etruscans (a tribe from the area just north of Rome – they later become bitter enemies of the Romans but that’s a different story). He says that the Etruscans will be happy to form an alliance with Aeneas and fight the Latins and the Rutulians (Turnus’ men) because Turnus has given sanctuary to the tyrant king they deposed, called Mezentius. Mezentius is a nasty piece of work, whose favourite method of execution was to tie his prisoners to corpses and leave them to die. Evander’s advice works: the Etruscans join the Trojan and Arcadian forces on the principle that my enemy’s enemy is my friend.

PHEW. The End.

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2292 words...**