

Extract from the introduction by Bernard Knox
to Robert Fagles' translation of *The Aeneid* by Virgil.

The *Aeneid* is to be Rome's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and it derives also from Homer its picture of two different worlds, each with its own passions and actions. One is the world of heaven above, in Homer the world of Zeus, the supreme god, his wife and sister, Hera, the love-goddess Aphrodite, the smith-god Hephaestus, the sea-god Poseidon and the others; and below, on earth, the world of Achilles, Patroclus, Diomedes and of Hector, his wife Andromache, and his father Priam. In the *Aeneid* the heavens are the home of Jupiter (or Jove) the supreme god, his wife and sister Juno, the love-goddess Venus, the smith-god Vulcan, the sea-god Neptune, and the minor gods. They preside over the world of the heroes— Aeneas, Turnus, Evander, Pallas, and Camilla down below. As in Homer, the passions and actions of the gods affect the actions and passions of the heroes on earth.

Jupiter knows what the Fates have decreed, what will happen in the end—that Aeneas will reach Italy and found Lavinium, the beginning of the process that over the centuries will lead to the founding of Rome. But Juno is bitterly opposed to this vision of the future; she hated Troy while it stood, and all Trojans since with a vicious aversion, and she is determined that Aeneas will not reach Italy. This hatred of Trojans has many causes: the fact that their ancestor was Dardanus, the son of Zeus and Electra, daughter of Atlas—"the Trojan stock she loathed" (1.35); the fact that Ganymede, a beautiful boy whose father was Laomedon, a Trojan prince, had been carried up to Olympus by Zeus, who assumed the shape of an eagle, to be his cupbearer—"the honors showered on Ganymede" (1.35)— and lastly the so-called Judgment of Paris, delivered while Troy still stood secure at peace behind its walls. Three goddesses, Juno, Athena, and Venus, disputed which was the most beautiful and finally decided on a beauty contest to be judged by Paris, a son of Priam, king of Troy. As he surveyed their charms, each one offered him a bribe to win his vote. The virgin goddess Athena offered him success in war, Juno success in every walk of life, but Venus offered the love and the hand of the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen, wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta in Greece. He judges Venus the most beautiful, goes to Sparta, runs off to Troy with Helen, and the ten-year war begins. Juno never forgot this insult; it is mentioned at the beginning of Virgil's poem, "the judgment of Paris, the unjust slight to her beauty" (1.34). And this is one of the reasons why she

drove over endless oceans Trojans left by the Greeks

...

Juno kept them far from Latium, forced by the Fates to wander round the seas of the world, year in, year out. Such a long hard labor it was to found the Roman people.

(1.37-41)

After this line the narrative begins. It is the opening of an epic poem, divided into twelve books containing roughly ten thousand lines.

Virgil, *The Aeneid*, translated by Robert Fagles (2006), New York: Viking. pp.16-17.