VIRGIL
(Publius Vergilius Maro)

(Books VII-XII)

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
Omar Al-Nakib
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**Aeneid**

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*Ovid in Exile* (Interbirth Books, 2007)
*Field Work* (BlazeVOX Books, 2011)
*Cotton Nero A.x.: The Works of the ‘Pearl’ Poet* (with Lisa Ampleman, Chris Piuma, Daniel Remein; eth press, 2014)
*Aeneid*, Books 1-6 (Shearsman Books, 2015)
*Holy Sonnets to Orpheus and Other Poems* (Delete Press, 2018)

Chapbooks

*SF Spleen* (Skanky Possum, 2006)
*Translations from Creeley* (Sardines Press, 2008)
*Aeneid*, from books 1 and 2 (little red leaves textile series, 2013)
*Aeneid*, from book 3 (little red leaves textile series, 2014)
*Aeneid*, from book 4 (little red leaves textile series, 2014)
*Sports* (habenicht press, 2015)
SAMPLER
Aeneas and his Trojans have arrived in Italy at last. Driven across the seas by the wrath of Juno, they’ve endured many hardships and wrong turns. In Carthage, Aeneas nearly married Queen Dido and settled his people in Africa. Having slipped away from Carthage, he commemorated the death of his father with funeral games. Then he paid a visit to the afterworld and consulted the shade of his father. Now the end of the Trojans’ wanderings is in sight – but Juno makes one last-ditch effort to stop them.
I. ac formae magnorum ululare luporum

And you, Aeneas’ nurse
gave great fame to our shores
in death the name
HESPERIA
commemorates your bones

one last
last rite
pious Aeneas performs before
leaving port. Smooth sailing.
A friendly breeze, bright moon,
sea gleaming fore and aft.

They scrape close to the shore of Circe
the well-off daughter of the sun
whose closed groves resound with ceaseless
song
fragrant cedar burning in luxuriant halls
to sweeten the night
as Circe passes, twitching
her many webs.

What’s that?
The wretched moans of a lion
chafing at chains, roaring under
midnight’s yoke
raging of boars
and caged bears
look there!

wolf-shapes raising
great heads to howl
all of them once men, now dosed
by cruel Circe to grow beastly
feathers and fur and hides.

But the good guys of Troy
don’t suffer such fates.
Neptune blows their sails full
letting them breeze through
the boiling shallows until
Dawn turns the sea red and light
rises to fill the sky.

Aeneas sees: a huge wood
with a river (the Tiber)
wind ing through, quietly gathering
steam to a mighty rapids throwing
gold spray from rich sand
delighting the eye.

With a shit-eating grin he orders
the sails trimmed, strange plumes
and birdsong filling the air
as they pass silently
through the woods on the dark water.
in death the name
HESPERIA
commemorates your bones
SAMPLER
II. *maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo*

Remind me, Erato!
What was the state of play
who were the kings, when that fleet
first hit Ausonian shores?
Let me unfold the cause of
the first battle, goddess,
whisper
into the ear of your bard
and I’ll spin
awful war, battle arrays
and brave kings rushing
to death
the Tyrrhenian bands and all
Hesperia armed—
to me the greater tale
is born, the greater work
I’ll now assay.

Old King Latinus held lands and cities
in a long-lasting peace.
A Laurentine nymph named Marica
was his mom, his dad Faunus
whose father was Picus and
his dad, Saturn,
it’s said, ultimate author of that line.
But no sons for Latinus. By fate’s decree they were all snatched away, cut down in youth.
So: only a daughter, grown ripe for a husband, a sweet, sweet virgin of perfect age.

Many suitors from Greater Latium sought her hand. Turnus the most promising of all.
He’d come from potent stock and the queen was eager to lock him down in marriage, make him her son.

But bad omens stood in the way. Deep in the palace, a laurel tree preserved many years in sacred awe which dad had planted when he first built the compound, dedicated to Apollo (from this comes the appellation “Laurentine”)
a huge buzzing came across the sky (bizarre as it seems) and BEES alighted there, swarming a high branch the priest, freaked out called it a sign that a stranger would come leading a huge host and settle just so in the citadel.

Meanwhile in lighting the altars Lavinia standing beside her dad
FLAME
(for fuck’s sake!)       leapt
into her long, bunched-up hair
and consumed her accoutrements, crackling
and burning her queenly crown
the smoke rolling yellow through
the whole house.
Crazy!

Everyone took this as a sign, too
that she’d be lustrous and noble in her own fame
but portend
WAR
to her people.

The King, bugged by all these omens,
sped to the oracle of Faunus
where deep in the forest the priestess
breathes from a sacred font
a dark
cruel
vapor

This is where everyone in Italy goes for answers.
They bring gifts to the priestess
who lies on thick fleece from
slaughtered sheep, dreaming
weird dreams of spirits
flitting about, hearing
weird voices,
conversing with gods and communing
with Acheron in
deepest hell.

It was to her Latinus hurried
offering 100 wooly sheep
in sacrifice, groveling
on their shorn, stretched
hides, and from deep
in the forest her voice 
boomed:

“Don’t seek, my son, to marry your daughter
among Latin hordes,
nor believe in the mapped-out
wedding plans.
Aliens are coming whose blood
will lift our name and whose kids
will roll the world like a ball
at their feet.”
The oracle of Faunus