

What impression does Virgil give of the Underworld in this section of Aeneid Book VI?

a) At the start Aeneas and the Sibyl are in an area of little light and no colour, and seem to be in the entrance of a house, but surrounded by spirits. These represent abstract horrors which mankind faces in the normal world, and as spirits they seem in themselves to be unpleasant. Adjectives such as *tristis*, *turpis* and *mortiferum* describe them. The last - and perhaps most relevant to Virgil's generation is Discord, described as crazy and bloody, and snake-like. Not far away, as if in a kind of garden, are several mythical and generally unpleasant creatures. It is all portrayed as confused and unclear.

As happens later too, our reaction to these is supported by Aeneas' own reaction. He is worried by them and wants to fight them. They seem very real to him, but somehow are not real, the Sibyl says.

b) The rivers of the underworld are unpleasant - large, deep, dirty and swirling, and their description makes them seem incomprehensible and worrying. The ferryman Charon is also disturbing: he is described immediately as *horrendus*, and apart from this is filthy, badly-dressed, old and yet strong. Even his boat, described in this section and again later, seems old and barely adequate.

c) The souls by the river described here are disturbing too. They are very numerous, and all desperate to cross the water. Two details make the scene sadder: they are stretching out their hands, and feel, strangely, "love" for the other side, which we suspect is not that good. The descriptions in the list make their deaths seem particularly sad, identifying them as individuals. Aeneas is surprised and worried by the scene, and we feel it more because of his reaction.

In spite of the detail given, and the fact that there are rules, everything is unclear and hard to understand. All in all it seems to be worrying and depressing.