

IGCSE texts 2020/2021 - Virgil Aeneid VI summary

Aeneas is going to the Underworld to see his father.

264-267

Introductory appeal for permission to reveal secrets of the Underworld (as if Virgil has special knowledge, but needs to share it!)

268-294

The beginning of the journey - of Aeneas and the Sibyl. The “geography” does not make sense. All part of the apparent unreality.

1 Darkness, “empty”. Simile of a night with only a feeble moon.

2 The Abstract Horrors are by the entrance. Notice variety in the list. Discord (Rome’s civil wars?) is emphasised: longer, mad and bloody, and at the end.

3 Under an elm tree, monsters, some named directly, some named indirectly, one (Geryon) only referred to. The Scyllas are strangely plural.

Aeneas reacts bravely but foolishly: ignorance and naivety.

295-304

The river(s) and Charon.

The rivers are unpleasant and so is he. Hair, clothes, eyes. We are told that he is a guard too.

305-316

Charon at work.

A crowd of all ages, relationships stressed, some had had full lives, others died young. The number heading together for a destination stressed in a **double simile**, each with a different additional emphasis:

a) with the leaves there is the sense of their death too, and the cold.

b) the birds flocking are more like the souls: they also long for something on the other side of water (unlike the leaves!)

He accepts some, rejects others.

317-330

The souls

Aeneas asks about this, in particular why some cross and others do not.

Sibyl explains that the crowd consists of unburied souls, who have to wait 100 years.

331-336

Two souls not crossing

Aeneas sees two of his men lost overboard after leaving Troy, Leucaspis and Orontes.

337-346

Palinurus (i)

Then he sees Palinurus, the helmsman lost more recently. Aeneas speaks to him and says he is surprised to see him as it had been prophesied that Palinurus would reach Italy.

347-371

Palinurus (ii)

Palinurus tells his story: he fell overboard while working hard and responsibly, and was worried for the ship. After 3 nights in the sea, he had just reached Italy when he was killed by locals keen to rob him. He asks Aeneas to find his body (south of Naples) and bury it or for him to be allowed to cross with Aeneas - who is clearly privileged.

372-383

Palinurus (iii)

The Sibyl tells him off. His prayers will not affect the gods! But the locals will be persuaded by omens to find his body and give it proper burial. Palinurus is quite happy.

384-397

Charon again

Charon sees Aeneas (clearly not a ghost) approaching and tells him off. He has made previous mistakes allowing Hercules (Cerberus) and Theseus and Pirithous (Proserpina) to cross.

398-410

The Bough

The Sibyl says he should not worry, and explains that Aeneas (an excellent man) has come to see his father. She shows the Golden Bough which convinces him. He moves the boat back to the bank where they are standing.

411-416

On the boat

The boat already has passengers, whom Charon removes. Aeneas goes aboard. The boat leaks. They reach the other side.