

Aeneid Book VI Analysis 8: Themes: Gods and Mythical Creatures



The Romans had a confused idea of the gods and their powers, it seems to me, perhaps because they inherited their Pantheon largely from the Greeks, equating their own Roman deities with Greek ones as far as possible. A very good case can be made out for the Greek gods and their associates being a distortion of actual history (though sadly you will not get marks for pointing this out on the exam paper) rather than a total invention. Jupiter and Juno (Greek Zeus *Ζεύς* and Hera *Ἥρα*) are equivalent to Adam and Eve, Hercules (Greek Heracles *Ἡρακλῆς*) to Nimrod and so on. However, the crucial difference is that the Greek system reverses good and evil. The serpent bestows **true** wisdom on mankind in the Greek system. Cain, the murderer¹, is the Greeks' Hephaistos, (*Ἥφαιστος*), Vulcan the blacksmith god. Seth, Cain's younger brother was Ares (*Ἄρης*) to the Greeks or Mars to the Romans. Thus Seth, given to Eve as consolation after the murder by Cain of godly Abel, was characterised as a brutal god of war; and evil Cain whose ways the Bible warns against² is a benefactor in the Greek system!³

In the mythology depicted in the Aeneid, Aeneas himself is the son of a goddess, Venus. Venus is the goddess of love (Aphrodite, *Ἀφροδίτη*, in Greek) and the patroness of the Trojans. She protects her son whenever Juno (Aeneas' enemy) tries to hurt him and this causes conflict among the gods. In Virgil's Aeneid Juno hates the Trojans because they are destined to found Rome which is destined to destroy Carthage, her favourite city. It was important to the Romans to see themselves as descended from the gods via Aeneas. Although the war with Carthage (the Punic Wars) took place long ago in 264-146BC (Virgil wrote the Aeneid between 29 and 19BC) the Romans considered Carthage as a traditional enemy.⁴ Virgil's patron was the Emperor Augustus and Virgil was keen to point out the parallels between him and Aeneas. Aeneas founded Rome: Augustus founded a New Rome. Aeneas was the son of a goddess: Augustus was the adopted son of Julius Caesar who had been declared a god after his assassination in 42BC.

The main deities/mythological monsters in the passage set for IGCSE is are Celaeno and the other Harpies and Polyphemus.

1 1 John 3:12

2 Jude 1:11

3 You can read all about this in detail if you are interested here: <https://creation.com/athena-and-eve>

4 This intermeshes with what we learn in our study of Cicero also. See the lesson for Year 2 Term 1 Week 3 Day 2.

Celano we looked at in the previous lesson. Jupiter, King of the gods (and husband of Juno, Aeneas' enemy) is mentioned by Celano herself and Anchises also prays to the mighty gods. As a result of this prayer, the horrible fate announced by Celano is in fact diverted to something harmless, although it still comes to pass.

Polyphemus the Cyclops is powerfully and gruesomely presented in the lines set for IGCSE.

Exam style questions:

1. *visceral miserorum et sanguine vescitur atro.*
2. *vidi egomet duo de numero cum corpora nostro*
3. *prensa manu magna medio resupinus in antro*
4. *frangeret ad saxum, sanieque aspersa natarent*
5. *limina; vidi atro cum membra fluentia tabo*
6. *manderet et tepidi tremarent sub dentibus artus—*
7. *haud impune quidem, nec talia passus Ulixes*
8. *oblitusue sui est Ithacus discrimine tanto.*

1. Who is speaking and to whom? [2]
2. Who is the speaker describing in lines 1-6 above? [2]
3. Write out and scan line 4 above, marking the long and short syllables and divisions between the feet. [2]

The first two of these questions require short answers, not necessarily even full sentences. The figures in brackets after the questions show how many marks the questions are worth. Notice that for two marks you must provide two pieces of information. So, for instance, in the first question there will be one mark for “who is speaking?” and another mark for “to whom?”

The third question is the scansion question. You get one mark for getting 3 feet correct and two for 6 correct feet. Notice that you are not asked to mark the caesura. At the moment do not try to do the scansion question without referring to your list of the six rules. Eventually you should memorise the rules.

Specimen answers on the next page.

Who is speaking and to whom? [2]

Achaemenides is speaking to Anchises, Aeneas and the other Trojans.

Who is the speaker describing in lines 1-6 above? [2]

Polyphemus the Cyclops.

Write out and scan line 4 above, marking the long and short syllables and divisions between the feet. [2]

Elisions:

frangeret ad saxum, sanie(que) aspersa natarent

Last two feet:

frangeret ad saxum, sanie(que) asp | ērsǎ nǎ | tārēnt

No diphthongs: NB:- *ie* is not a diphthong but two syllables.

frangeret ad saxum, sanie(que) asp | ērsǎ nǎ | tārēnt

Vowels before two consonants or *x* are long:

frāngeret ad sǎxūm, sanie(que) āsp | ērsǎ nǎ | tārēnt

Count the remaining syllables. 10: therefore two dactyls and two spondees.

The long syllable at the end of foot four means that foot four must be a spondee:

frāngeret ad sǎxūm, sani | ē(que) āsp | ērsǎ nǎ | tārēnt

If *sani* was a spondee *saxum* would also be a spondee. This would give too many spondees so the third foot must be a dactyl.

frāngeret ad sǎx | ūm, sǎnī | ē(que) āsp | ērsǎ nǎ | tārēnt

This reveals that the second foot must be a spondee:

frāngeret | ād sǎx | ūm, sǎnī | ē(que) āsp | ērsǎ nǎ | tārēnt

The first foot must therefore be the final dactyl:

frāngērēt | ād sǎx | ūm, sǎnī | ē(que) āsp | ērsǎ nǎ | tārēnt

Practice saying this line in the terrified tone you might imagine Achaemenides to have used.