

# The New Criterion

## Reconsiderations

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### That most awful poem, the *Aeneid*

by [Sarah Ruden](#)

A translator's tragic alliance.

When I was reading Virgil's *Aeneid* for the first time, in translation, for a Great Books course at the University of Michigan, I heard in lectures what I believe are the usual criticisms. The epic about the founding of Rome is an aluminum-sided monument. It was commissioned for obvious and ephemeral political reasons. It is shallow and defensive in its depiction of women, stilted and depressive in its religion, and hostile to the suspension of disbelief. Yet it represents one of the four or five most significant eras in the history of the West, the Augustan Age. The *Aeneid* has to be studied—*okay?*

That is in fact why I come to be translating it for Yale University Press. It's assigned all over the place in world literature surveys. A good version of it can make a name for a translator and open possibilities that works like—um—the *Satyricon* and *Lysistrata* do ...

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