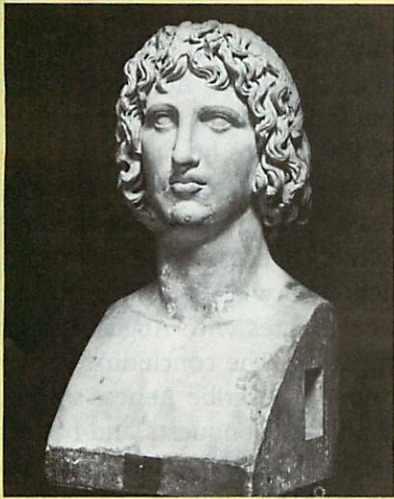




Virgil

70–19 B.C.



Alinari/Art Resource, New York

Publius Vergilius Maro, known as Virgil (vur'jəl), lived most of his life under the shadow of political turmoil. During his youth and early adult years, various political factions struggled for control of Rome in a series of bloody civil wars. Only when Virgil was nearly forty did Julius Caesar's great-nephew Octavian finally restore order by becoming Rome's sole ruler. The reign of Octavian, who used the honorary title *Augustus* (meaning "revered one"), ushered in one of the longest eras of peace and order in the history of Rome. It was during this time that Virgil composed his epic history of the founding of Rome.

Born near the northern town of Mantua, Virgil had deep roots in the Italian countryside. His father was a farmer who found the

means to provide Virgil with a good education. This was the first opportunity for the shy young Virgil to experience the sophisticated life of the city. In Rome, like youths of nobler birth, Virgil studied widely in Greek law, philosophy, and literature. He tried life in the court system but found it too nerve-racking. With the outbreak of another war, Virgil retired to his country home. There he began to write pastoral poetry, or poetry that idealizes rural life.

During the war, the land owned by Virgil's family was confiscated. It was returned later through the influence of Octavian's minister of propaganda, who had taken an interest in Virgil's work. With the publication of the pastoral *Eclogues*, Virgil's reputation was fully established, and he turned away from the pastoral form to write the epic story of Aeneas, called the *Aeneid*. He worked slowly and methodically on the *Aeneid* during the last ten years of his life. In a letter, he complained that the project was driving him "almost out of his mind." When the poem was nearly complete, Virgil became ill during a voyage to Greece. With his dying breath he begged his friends to burn the manuscript, for he was not satisfied with it. Fortunately, the emperor Augustus, who recognized the value of Virgil's poem both as literature and as favorable propaganda for his own rule, refused to comply with the poet's last wish and preserved the *Aeneid* for future generations.

I ntroduction

The Aeneid

At an early point in his career, Virgil resolved to devote his poetic powers to composing a great national epic of Rome that would put recent Roman achievements on a par with those of the Greeks. In writing a long epic about the wanderings of a refugee from Troy, Virgil consciously imitated Homer (see page 224). The first six books of the *Aeneid* contain many episodes and scenes inspired by Homer's *Odyssey*, while the last six books are roughly modeled on scenes from the *Iliad*. On one level, the story of Aeneas is not so different from that of Odysseus, who, returning from the Trojan wars, traveled far and met with much adventure.

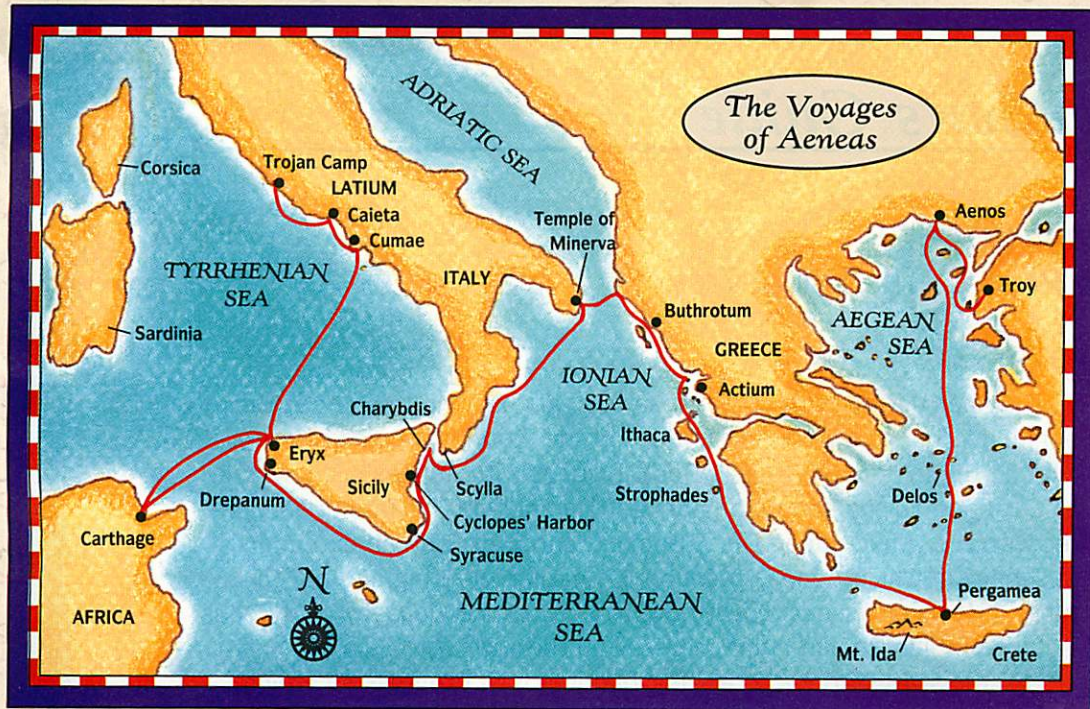
The Story of Aeneas

Aeneas's travels begin when he goes into exile after the fall and burning of Troy. The ghost of his dead wife, Creusa, has told him to sail to Italy, where he will found an empire. Over the following six years, Aeneas travels by sea, often blown off course. At one point he lands in Carthage, where he meets Queen Dido. They fall in love and plan to marry, but the gods push Aeneas on towards Italy. As he sails from Carthage, Dido curses him and dramatically

commits suicide out of grief at his departure. In Cumae, Aeneas consults the priestess Sibyl who takes him to the underworld, where he meets the ghost of his father, Anchises. There Aeneas receives a fuller prophecy of the founding of Rome. He sees a long line of Roman leaders who will descend from him. The line culminates with Augustus, Virgil's own patron. The concluding books of the *Aeneid* describe Aeneas's arrival in Italy and the conquests and battles he undergoes in order to establish a settlement for his people and to begin the Roman culture.

A New Kind of Epic Hero

Virgil, being thoroughly Roman, could not help but transform everything he borrowed from his Greek epic model. Most importantly, he refashioned the characterization of the Homeric heroes, adjusting them to fit a concept of the ideal Roman character. It is significant, for example, that the first time Virgil presents his hero in Book 1, Aeneas is weeping in frustration and envying the dead who fell at Troy. Virgil's Aeneas is no machine-like, larger-than-life warrior like Homer's Achilles; he is complex and enigmatic. He is courageous and valiant,



but also deeply sensitive and often divided by the conflict between duty and passion. The *Aeneid* marks the passing of an older heroic ideal and its replacement with a more complex hero sharply constricted by adverse fate and human limitations. Virgil repeatedly stresses that Aeneas's greatness involves his ability to sacrifice his own will for the public good. Aeneas achieves great things, but he is also acutely aware that no achievement is possible without pain and loss.

Virgil's Influence

Virgil is a classical writer who has had a great influence on Western literature not only because of the quality of his work, but also because of the time in which he lived and the values he admired. The Age of Augustus, which the poet celebrated, was one of the high

points of Roman civilization. Virgil created his epic of Rome shortly before the birth of Christ and the founding of the Christian religion, whose history would be affected by the Roman Empire for the next four centuries. One reason for Virgil's remarkable impact on later literature was his appeal to Christian authors and educators during the early centuries and later in the Middle Ages. Christianity condemned many pagan authors as unsuitable reading, but the moral virtues of duty, moderation, and piety that Virgil emphasized made him acceptable to Christians, and his poems were used as school texts. Literary critics eventually recognized Virgil's poetry as the fullest development of classical epic and pastoral poetry. The *Aeneid* became a model that inspired the works of Dante Alighieri (see page 741), Edmund Spenser, and John Milton, among others.

Reader's Guide

from the AENEID

from Book 2, The Fall of Troy

Background

Like Homer before him, Virgil chose to begin his long tale not at the beginning, but at a point in the thick of the story: *in medias res*, literally "in the middle of things." Book 1 opens with Aeneas's shipwreck at Carthage on the shores of North Africa and with his fateful encounter with the tragic queen Dido. Books 2 and 3 provide an extended flashback in which Aeneas recounts his earlier suffering and adventures, just as Odysseus does in Books 9-12 of the *Odyssey*. (Odysseus is called by his Roman name, Ulysses, in the *Aeneid*.)

At the start of Book 2, a great banquet is in progress, at which Dido asks Aeneas to describe his experiences during the fall of Troy. The banquet hall at Carthage is hushed as Aeneas summons the inner strength to recount in this lengthy flashback the "unspeakable" suffering of his people during the siege of the Greeks. Aeneas will speak firsthand of the infamous Trojan horse, the death of King Priam, and his encounters with Helen of Troy, his mother (the goddess Venus), and the ghost of his wife, Creusa.

Writer's Response

Do you think the lives of great leaders show a mixture of triumph and tragedy, achievements and setbacks? Think of one or two great leaders, either living or dead, whom you admire. Freewrite on the theme of triumph and tragedy in the lives of these leaders.

Literary Focus

Conflict is a struggle or clash between opposing characters, forces, or emotions. In an **external conflict**, a character struggles against some outside force: another character, society as a whole, or some natural force. For example, during much of Book 2, Aeneas must fight the invading Greeks. An **internal conflict**, on the other hand, is a struggle between opposing needs, desires, or emotions within a single character. In Book 2, Virgil depicts Aeneas as suffering from internal conflicts at several points in the narrative. One example is his desire to destroy Helen despite Venus's warning to him.



from the **AENEID**
from Book 2: The Fall of Troy
Virgil

translated by
ROBERT FITZGERALD

|| As you read, note how Virgil uses many of the elements of the Homeric epic, such as elaborate similes, epithets—or repeated, concise descriptions—and dramatic speeches.

CHARACTERS IN THE AENEID

Aeneas (i·nē'əs): ancestor of the Roman rulers; son of the goddess Venus and Anchises, the king of Dardanus.

Anchises (an·kī'sēz'): father of Aeneas; king of Dardanus; ally of Priam—the king of Troy.

Ascanius (as·kā'nēəs): son of Aeneas and Creusa, also called Iulus.

Creusa (krē·yōō'sə): Priam's daughter; wife of Aeneas; first to tell him to journey to Italy.

Dido (dī'dō): queen of Carthage; lover of Aeneas who kills herself when he leaves her for Italy.

The Sibyl (sib'əl): the priestess of Apollo who leads Aeneas through the underworld.

"Knowing their strength broken in warfare, turned
Back by the fates, and years—so many years—
Already slipped away, the Danaan° captains
By the divine handicraft of Pallas° built
5 A horse of timber, tall as a hill,
And sheathed its ribs with planking of cut pine.
This they gave out to be an offering
For a safe return by sea, and the word went round.

3. **Danaan** (dān'ə:n): a name for the Greeks.

4. **Pallas** (pal'əs): a name for the goddess Athena, here called Minerva.

10 But on the sly they shut inside a company
 Chosen from their picked soldiery by lot,
 Crowding the vaulted caverns in the dark—
 The horse's belly—with men fully armed.
 Offshore there's a long island, Tenedos,^o
 Famous and rich while Priam's kingdom lasted,
 15 A treacherous anchorage now, and nothing more.
 They crossed to this and hid their ships behind it
 On the bare shore beyond. We thought they'd gone,
 Sailing home to Mycenae^o before the wind,
 So Teucer's town^o is freed of her long anguish,
 20 Gates thrown wide! And out we go in joy
 To see the Dorian^o campsites, all deserted,
 The beach they left behind. Here the Dolopians^o
 Pitched their tents, here cruel Achilles lodged,
 There lay the ships, and there, formed up in ranks,
 25 They came inland to fight us. Of our men
 One group stood marveling, gaping up to see
 The dire gift of the cold unbedded goddess,^o
 The sheer mass of the horse.

Thymoetes^o shouts

It should be hauled inside the walls and moored
 30 High on the citadel—whether by treason
 Or just because Troy's fate went that way now.
 Capys^o opposed him; so did the wiser heads:
 'Into the sea with it,' they said, 'or burn it,
 Build up a bonfire under it,
 35 This trick of the Greeks, a gift no one can trust,
 Or cut it open, search the hollow belly!'

Contrary notions pulled the crowd apart.
 Next thing we knew, in front of everyone,
 Laocoon with a great company
 40 Came furiously running from the Height,
 And still far off cried out: 'O my poor people,
 Men of Troy, what madness has come over you?
 Can you believe the enemy truly gone?
 A gift from the Danaans, and no ruse?
 45 Is that Ulysses'^o way, as you have known him?
 Achaeans^o must be hiding in this timber,
 Or it was built to butt against our walls,
 Peer over them into our houses, pelt
 The city from the sky. Some crookedness

13. **Tenedos** (ten'ədäs): an island sacred to Apollo.

18. **Mycenae** (mī-sē'nē): capital of the kingdom ruled by Agamemnon.

19. **Teucer's town**: Teucer (tū'sēr) was a former king of Troy.

21. **Dorian** (dōr'ē-ən): one of the peoples of Greece.

22. **Dolopians** (dól-ō'pē-ənz): people from Thessaly.

27. **cold . . . goddess**: Minerva.

28. **Thymoetes** (thī-mō'tēz)

32. **Capys** (ka'pəs): Aeneas's comrade.

45. **Ulysses** (yōō-lis'ēz): the Roman name for the Greek hero Odysseus.

46. **Achaeans** (ə-kē'ənz): a name for the Greeks.

Sure of himself this man was, braced for it
Either way, to work his trick or die.

70 From every quarter Trojans run to see him,
Ring the prisoner round, and make a game
Of jeering at him. Be instructed now
In Greek deceptive arts: one barefaced deed
Can tell you of them all.

The spy Sinon puts on a convincing performance to persuade the Trojans that he has escaped from the Greeks after being betrayed and condemned to death. Having gained the Trojans' confidence, he easily makes them believe that the Greeks have abandoned the siege of the city, leaving the strange wooden horse behind to appease the angry gods.

75 And now another sign, more fearful still,
Broke on our blind miserable people,
Filling us all with dread. Laocoon,
Acting as Neptune's priest that day by lot,
Was on the point of putting to the knife
80 A massive bull before the appointed altar,
When ah—look there!
From Tenedos, on the calm sea, twin snakes—
I shiver to recall it—endlessly
Coiling, uncoiling, swam abreast for shore,
85 Their underbellies showing as their crests
Reared red as blood above the swell; behind
They glided with great undulating backs.
Now came the sound of thrashed seawater foaming;
Now they were on dry land, and we could see
90 Their burning eyes, fiery and suffused with blood,
Their tongues a-flicker out of hissing maws.
We scattered, pale with fright. But straight ahead
They slid until they reached Laocoon.
Each snake enveloped one of his two boys,
95 Twining about and feeding on the body.
Next they ensnared the man as he ran up
With weapons: coils like cables looped and bound him
Twice round the middle; twice about his throat
They whipped their back-scales, and their heads
towered,
100 While with both hands he fought to break the knots.

Pitched in to get the figure underpinned
 With rollers, hempen lines around the neck.
 Deadly, pregnant with enemies, the horse
 120 Crawled upward to the breach. And boys and girls
 Sang hymns around the towrope as for joy
 They touched it. Rolling on, it cast a shadow
 Over the city's heart. O Fatherland,
 O Ilium,^o home of gods! Defensive wall
 125 Renowned in war for Dardanus's people!
 There on the very threshold of the breach
 It jarred to a halt four times, four times the arms
 In the belly thrown together made a sound—
 Yet on we strove unmindful, deaf and blind,
 130 To place the monster on our blessed height.
 Then, even then, Cassandra's lips unsealed
 The doom to come: lips by a god's command
 Never believed or heeded by the Trojans.
 So pitifully we, for whom that day
 135 Would be the last, made all our temples green
 With leafy festal boughs throughout the city.

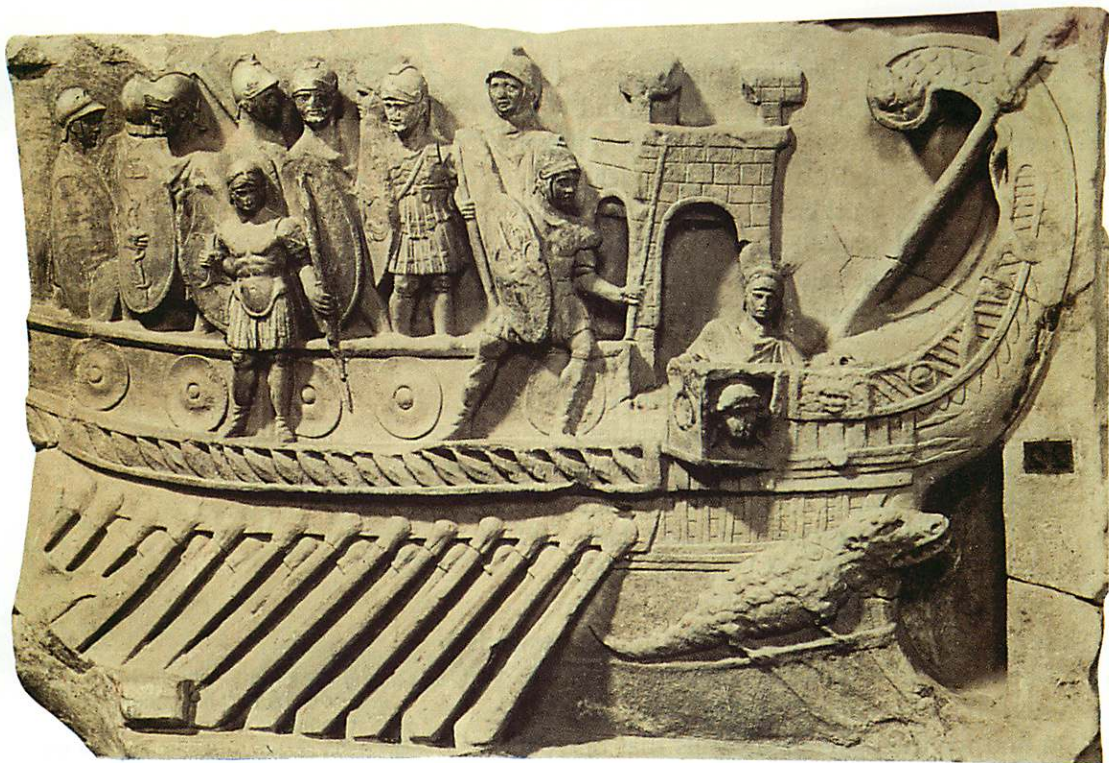
124. **Ilium** (il'ē-əm): another name for Troy.

As heaven turned, Night from the Ocean stream
 Came on, profound in gloom on earth and sky
 And Myrmidons^o in hiding. In their homes
 140 The Teucrians lay silent, wearied out,
 And sleep enfolded them. The Argive fleet,
 Drawn up in line abreast, left Tenedos
 Through the aloof moon's friendly stillnesses
 And made for the familiar shore. Flame signals
 145 Shone from the command ship. Sinon, favored
 By what the gods unjustly had decreed,
 Stole out to tap the pine walls and set free
 The Danaans in the belly. Opened wide,
 The horse emitted men; gladly they dropped
 150 Out of the cavern, captains first, Thessandrus,
 Sthenelus and the man of iron, Ulysses;
 Hand over hand upon the rope, Acamas, Thoas,
 Neoptolemus and Prince Machaon,^o
 Menelaus and then the master builder,
 155 Epeos,^o who designed the horse decoy.
 Into the darkened city, buried deep
 In sleep and wine, they made their way,
 Cut the few sentries down,

139. **Myrmidons** (mər'mə-dānz'): followers of Achilles.

150–153. **Thessandrus** (thə-san'drəs); **Sthenelus** (sthen'ə-ləs); **Acamas** (ak'ə-məs); **Thoas** (thō'əs); **Machaon** (ma-kā'on)

155. **Epeos** (e-pē'əs).



Scala/Art Resource, New York

Wall carving of a Roman ship and its warriors.

Let in their fellow soldiers at the gate,
160 And joined their combat companies as planned.
That time of night it was when the first sleep,
Gift of the gods, begins for ill mankind,
Arriving gradually, delicious rest.
In sleep, in dream, Hector appeared to me,
165 Gaunt with sorrow, streaming tears, all torn—
As by the violent car on his death day—
And black with bloody dust,
His puffed-out feet cut by the rawhide thongs.
Ah god, the look of him! How changed
170 From that proud Hector who returned to Troy
Wearing Achilles' armor, or that one
Who pitched the torches on Danaan ships;
His beard all filth, his hair matted with blood,
Showing the wounds, the many wounds, received
175 Outside his father's city walls. I seemed
Myself to weep and call upon the man
In grieving speech, brought from the depth of me.

'Light of Dardania, best hope of Troy,
 What kept you from us for so long, and where?
 180 From what far place, O Hector, have you come,
 Long, long awaited? After so many deaths
 Of friends and brothers, after a world of pain
 For all our folk and all our town, at last,
 Bonewearry, we behold you! What has happened
 185 To ravage your serene face? Why these wounds?'

He wasted no reply on my poor questions
 But heaved a great sigh from his chest and said:
 'Ai! Give up and go, child of the goddess,^o
 Save yourself, out of these flames. The enemy
 190 Holds the city walls, and from her height
 Troy falls in ruin. Fatherland and Priam
 Have their due; if by one hand our towers
 Could be defended, by this hand, my own,
 They would have been. Her holy things, her gods
 195 Of hearth and household^o Troy commends to you.
 Accept them as companions of your days;
 Go find for them the great walls that one day
 You'll dedicate, when you have roamed the sea.'

As he said this, he brought out from the sanctuary
 200 Chaplets and Vesta, Lady of the Hearth,
 With her eternal fire.

While I dreamed,
 The turmoil rose, with anguish, in the city.
 More and more, although Anchises' house
 Lay in seclusion, muffled among trees,
 205 The din at the grim onset grew; and now
 I shook off sleep, I climbed to the roof top
 To cup my ears and listen. And the sound
 Was like the sound a grassfire makes in grain,
 Whipped by a Southwind, or a torrent foaming
 210 Out of a mountainside to strew in ruin
 Fields, happy crops, the yield of plowing teams,
 Or woodlands borne off in the flood; in wonder
 The shepherd listens on a rocky peak.
 I knew then what our trust had won for us,
 215 Knew the Danaan fraud: Deiphobus^o
 Great house in flames, already caving in
 Under the overpowering god of fire;
 Ucalegon's^o already caught nearby;

188. **child of the goddess:** Aeneas is the son of Venus.

194–195. **gods . . . household:** Romans had household and domestic gods called Lares (lā'rēz) and Penates (pē-nā'tēz').

HRW Photo By Ba



Temple of Vesta in Rome. *Vesta was the goddess of the hearth and home.*

215. **Deiphobus** (dē'ə-fō'bəs)

218. **Ucalegon** (yōō-kal'ə-gän)

220 The glare lighting the straits beyond Sigeum;^o
 The cries of men, the wild calls of the trumpets.
 To arm was my first maddened impulse—not
 That anyone had a fighting chance in arms;
 Only I burned to gather up some force
 For combat, and to man some high redoubt.^o
 225 So fury drove me, and it came to me
 That meeting death was beautiful in arms.
 Then here, eluding the Achaean spears,
 Came Panthus, Othrys^o son, priest of Apollo,
 Carrying holy things, our conquered gods,
 230 And pulling a small grandchild along; he ran
 Despairing to my doorway.

'Where's the crux,
 Panthus,' I said. 'What strongpoint shall we hold?'
 Before I could say more, he groaned and answered:
 'The last day for Dardania has come,
 235 The hour not to be fought off any longer.
 Trojans we have been; Ilium has been;
 The glory of the Teucrians is no more;
 Black Jupiter has passed it on to Argos.^o
 Greeks are the masters in our burning city.
 240 Tall as a cliff, set in the heart of town,
 Their horse pours out armed men. The conqueror,
 Gloating Sinon, brews new conflagrations.
 Troops hold the gates—as many thousand men
 As ever came from great Mycenae; others
 245 Block the lanes with crossed spears; glittering
 In a combat line, swordblades are drawn for slaughter.
 Even the first guards at the gates can barely
 Offer battle, or blindly make a stand.'

Impelled by these words, by the powers of heaven,
 250 Into the flames I go, into the fight,
 Where the harsh Fury, and the din and shouting,
 Skyward rising, calls. Crossing my path
 In moonlight, five fell in with me, companions:
 Ripheus, and Epytus, a great soldier,
 255 Hypanis, Dymas, cleaving to my side
 With young Coroebus, Mygdon's^o son. It happened
 That in those very days this man had come
 To Troy, aflame with passion for Cassandra,

219. **Sigeum** (si-jē'əm)

224. **redoubt** (ri-dout'): defense.

228. **Panthus** (pan'thēs); **Othrys**
(ōth'ris)

238. **Argos** (är'gōs, -ges): a town
in the Peloponnesus.

254–256. **Ripheus** (rif'ōōs); **Epytus**
(e'pi-tēs); **Hypanis** (hī'pan-ēs);
Dymas (dī'mēs); **Mygdon**
(mig'dän)

Bringing to Priam and the Phrygians^o
260 A son-in-law's right hand. Unlucky one,
To have been deaf to what his bride foretold!
Now when I saw them grouped, on edge for battle,
I took it all in and said briefly,

'Soldiers,
Brave as you are to no end, if you crave
265 To face the last fight with me, and no doubt of it,
How matters stand for us each one can see.
The gods by whom this kingdom stood are gone,
Gone from the shrines and altars. You defend
A city lost in flames. Come, let us die,
270 We'll make a rush into the thick of it.
The conquered have one safety: hope for none.'

The desperate odds doubled their fighting spirit:
From that time on, like predatory wolves
In fog and darkness, when a savage hunger
275 Drives them blindly on, and cubs in lairs
Lie waiting with dry famished jaws—just so
Through arrow flights and enemies we ran
Toward our sure death, straight for the city's heart,
Cavernous black night over and around us.
280 Who can describe the havoc of that night
Or tell the deaths, or tally wounds with tears?
The ancient city falls, after dominion
Many long years. In windrows^o on the streets,
In homes, on solemn porches of the gods,
285 Dead bodies lie. And not alone the Trojans
Pay the price with their heart's blood; at times
Manhood returns to fire even the conquered
And Danaan conquerors fall. Grief everywhere,
Everywhere terror, and all shapes of death.

Aeneas and his small band of friends overcome a detachment of Greek soldiers and put on their armor and insignia. Thus disguised, they are able to cut down a number of the invaders.

290 When gods are contrary
They stand by no one. Here before us came
Cassandra, Priam's virgin daughter, dragged
By her long hair out of Minerva's shrine,
Lifting her brilliant eyes in vain to heaven—

259. **Phrygians** (frij'ē-enz): people of Phrygia, a country in Asia Minor where Troy was located.



Wall carving of a soldier in armor.

Scala/Art Resource, New York

283. **windrows**: rows of hay or grain that have been raked together.

295 Her eyes alone, as her white hands were bound.
Coroebus, infuriated, could not bear it,
But plunged into the midst to find his death.
We all went after him, our swords at play,
But here, here first, from the temple gable's height,
300 We met a hail of missiles from our friends,
Pitiful execution, by their error,
Who thought us Greek from our Greek plumes and
shields.
Then with a groan of anger, seeing the virgin
Wrested from them, Danaans from all sides
305 Rallied and attacked us: fiery Ajax,
Atreus'° sons, Dolopians in a mass—
As, when a cyclone breaks, conflicting winds
Will come together, Westwind, Southwind, Eastwind
Riding high out of the Dawnland; forests
310 Bend and roar, and raging all in spume
Nereus with his trident churns the deep.
Then some whom we had taken by surprise
Under cover of night throughout the city
And driven off, came back again: they knew
315 Our shields and arms for liars now, our speech
Alien to their own. They overwhelmed us.

306. **Atreus** (ā'trē-əs): father of Agamemnon and Menelaus.

One by one the remaining Trojan warriors are killed in a hail of missiles from their own side. Aeneas is drawn by the cry of battle to Priam's castle, where a great massacre is about to take place.

Mars gone berserk, Danaans
In a rush to scale the roof; the gate besieged
By a tortoise shell of overlapping shields.
320 Ladders clung to the wall, and men strove upward
Before the very doorposts, on the rungs,
Left hand putting the shield up, and the right
Reaching for the cornice. The defenders
Wrenched out upperworks and rooftiles: these
325 For missiles, as they saw the end, preparing
To fight back even on the edge of death.
And gilded beams, ancestral ornaments,
They rolled down on the heads below. In hall

Others with swords drawn held the entrance way,
 330 Packed there, waiting. Now we plucked up heart
 To help the royal house, to give our men
 A respite, and to add our strength to theirs,
 Though all were beaten. And we had for entrance
 A rear door, secret, giving on a passage
 335 Between the palace halls; in other days
 Andromache,^o poor lady, often used it,
 Going alone to see her husband's parents
 Or taking Astyanax^o to his grandfather.
 I climbed high on the roof, where hopeless men
 340 Were picking up and throwing futile missiles.
 Here was a tower like a promontory
 Rising toward the stars above the roof:
 All Troy, the Danaan ships, the Achaean camp,
 Were visible from this. Now close beside it
 345 With crowbars, where the flooring made loose joints,
 We pried it from its bed and pushed it over.
 Down with a rending crash in sudden ruin

336. **Andromache** (an-dräm'ə-kē):
 Hector's wife.

338. **Astyanax** (as-tī'ə-naks')



Lauros-Giraudon/Art Resource, New York

Attic cup, c. 5th century B.C. This vase depicts Cassandra, a wounded Trojan, and Andromache protecting her son Astyanax.

Wide over the Danaan lines it fell;
But fresh troops moved up, and the rain of stones
350 With every kind of missile never ceased.

Just at the outer doors of the vestibule
Sprang Pyrrhus, all in bronze and glittering,
As a serpent, hidden swollen underground
By a cold winter, writhes into the light,
355 On vile grass fed, his old skin cast away,
Renewed and glossy, rolling slippery coils,
With lifted underbelly rearing sunward
And triple tongue a-flicker. Close beside him
Giant Periphas and Automedon,^o
360 His armorbearer, once Achilles' driver,
Besieged the place with all the young of Scyros,^o
Hurling their torches at the palace roof.
Pyrrhus shouldering forward with an axe
Broke down the stony threshold, forced apart
365 Hinges and brazen doorjambs, and chopped through
One panel of the door, splitting the oak,
To make a window, a great breach. And there
Before their eyes the inner halls lay open,
The courts of Priam and the ancient kings,
370 With men-at-arms ranked in the vestibule.
From the interior came sounds of weeping,
Pitiful commotion, wails of women
High-pitched, rising in the formal chambers
To ring against the silent golden stars;
375 And, through the palace, mothers wild with fright
Ran to and fro or clung to doors and kissed them.
Pyrrhus with his father's brawn stormed on,
No bolts or bars or men availed to stop him:
Under his battering the double doors
380 Were torn out of their sockets and fell inward.
Sheer force cleared the way: the Greeks broke through
Into the vestibule, cut down the guards,
And made the wide hall seethe with men-at-arms—
A tumult greater than when dikes are burst
385 And a foaming river, swirling out in flood,
Whelms every parapet and races on
Through fields and over all the lowland plains,
Bearing off pens and cattle. I myself
Saw Neoptolemus furious with blood

359. **Periphas** (pəɹ'ə-fəs); **Auto-medon** (ô-tă'mə-dən)

361. **Scyros** (sī'rəs): an island in the Aegean Sea.

390 In the entrance way, and saw the two Atridae:^o
 Hecuba I saw, and her hundred daughters,
 Priam before the altars, with his blood
 Drenching the fires that he himself had blessed.
 Those fifty bridal chambers, hope of a line
 395 So flourishing; those doorways high and proud,
 Adorned with takings of barbaric gold,
 Were all brought low: fire had them, or the Greeks.
 What was the fate of Priam, you may ask.
 Seeing his city captive, seeing his own

400 Royal portals rent apart, his enemies
 In the inner rooms, the old man uselessly
 Put on his shoulders, shaking with old age,
 Armor unused for years, belted a sword on,
 And made for the massed enemy to die.

405 Under the open sky in a central court
 Stood a big altar; near it, a laurel tree
 Of great age, leaning over, in deep shade
 Embowered the Penates.^o At this altar
 Hecuba and her daughters, like white doves

410 Blown down in a black storm, clung together,
 Enfolding holy images in their arms.
 Now, seeing Priam in a young man's gear,
 She called out:

'My poor husband, what mad thought

Drove you to buckle on these weapons?

415 Where are you trying to go? The time is past
 For help like this, for this kind of defending,
 Even if my own Hector could be here.
 Come to me now: the altar will protect us,
 Or else you'll die with us.'

She drew him close,

420 Heavy with years, and made a place for him
 To rest on the consecrated stone.

Now see

Polites, one of Priam's sons, escaped
 From Pyrrhus' butchery and on the run

Through enemies and spears, down colonnades,

425 Through empty courtyards, wounded. Close behind
 Comes Pyrrhus burning for the death-stroke: has him,
 Catches him now, and lunges with the spear.
 The boy has reached his parents, and before them
 Goes down, pouring out his life with blood.

390. **Atridae** (ə-trī'dē): Agamemnon and Menelaus.

408. **Penates** (pē-nā'tēz'): Roman household gods.

430 Now Priam, in the very midst of death,
Would neither hold his peace nor spare his anger.

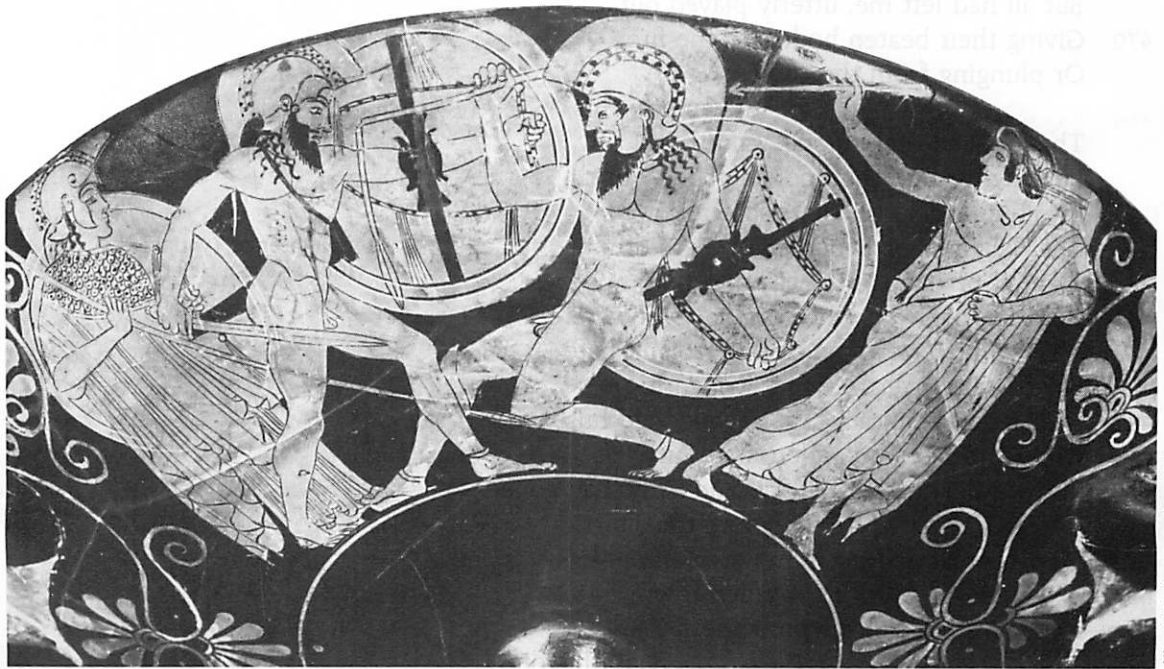
'For what you've done, for what you've dared,' he said,
'If there is care in heaven for atrocity,
May the gods render fitting thanks, reward you
435 As you deserve. You forced me to look on
At the destruction of my son: defiled
A father's eyes with death. That great Achilles
You claim to be the son of—and you lie—
Was not like you to Priam, his enemy;
440 To me who threw myself upon his mercy
He showed compunction, gave me back for burial
The bloodless corpse of Hector, and returned me
To my own realm.'

The old man threw his spear
With feeble impact; blocked by the ringing bronze,
445 It hung there harmless from the jutting boss.^o
Then Pyrrhus answered:

'You'll report the news
To Pelides,^o my father; don't forget
My sad behavior, the degeneracy
Of Neoptolemus. Now die.'

445. **boss:** here, an architectural protuberance.

447. **Pelides** (pē'li-dēz): Achilles, son of Peleus.



Bowl depicting soldiers in battle.

Alinari/Art Resource, New York

With this,

450 To the altar step itself he dragged him trembling,
Slipping in the pooled blood of his son,
And took him by the hair with his left hand.
The sword flashed in his right; up to the hilt
He thrust it in his body.

That was the end

455 Of Priam's age, the doom that took him off,
With Troy in flames before his eyes, his towers
Headlong fallen—he that in other days
Had ruled in pride so many lands and peoples,
The power of Asia.

On the distant shore

460 The vast trunk headless lies without a name.

For the first time that night, inhuman shuddering
Took me, head to foot. I stood unmanned,
And my dear father's image came to mind
As our king, just his age, mortally wounded,
465 Gasp'd his life away before my eyes.
Creusa came to mind, too, left alone;
The house plundered; danger to little Iulus.
I looked around to take stock of my men,
But all had left me, utterly played out,
470 Giving their beaten bodies to the fire
Or plunging from the roof.

It came to this,

That I stood there alone. And then I saw
Lurking beyond the doorsill of the Vesta,
In hiding, silent, in that place reserved,
475 The daughter of Tyndareus.^o Glare of fires
Lighted my steps this way and that, my eyes
Glancing over the whole scene, everywhere.
That woman, terrified of the Trojans' hate
For the city overthrown, terrified too
480 Of Danaan vengeance, her abandoned husband's
Anger after years—Helen, that Fury
Both to her own homeland and Troy, had gone
To earth, a hated thing, before the altars.
Now fires blazed up in my own spirit—
485 A passion to avenge my fallen town
And punish Helen's whorishness.

475. daughter of Tyndareus
(tin-der'ē-əs): Helen.

'Shall this one

Look untouched on Sparta and Mycenae
After her triumph, going like a queen,
And see her home and husband, kin and children,
490 With Trojan girls for escort, Phrygian slaves?
Must Priam perish by the sword for this?
Troy burn, for this? Dardania's littoral^o
Be soaked in blood, so many times, for this?
Not by my leave. I know
495 No glory comes of punishing a woman.
The feat can bring no honor. Still, I'll be
Approved for snuffing out a monstrous life,
For a just sentence carried out. My heart
Will teem with joy in this avenging fire,
500 And the ashes of my kin will be appeased.'

So ran my thoughts. I turned wildly upon her,
But at that moment, clear, before my eyes—
Never before so clear—in a pure light
Stepping before me, radiant through the night,
505 My loving mother came: immortal, tall,

492. **littoral** (lit'ə-rəl): here, shoreline.

*BURNING OF TROY, STEFANO DELLA BELLA
(1610-1664).*



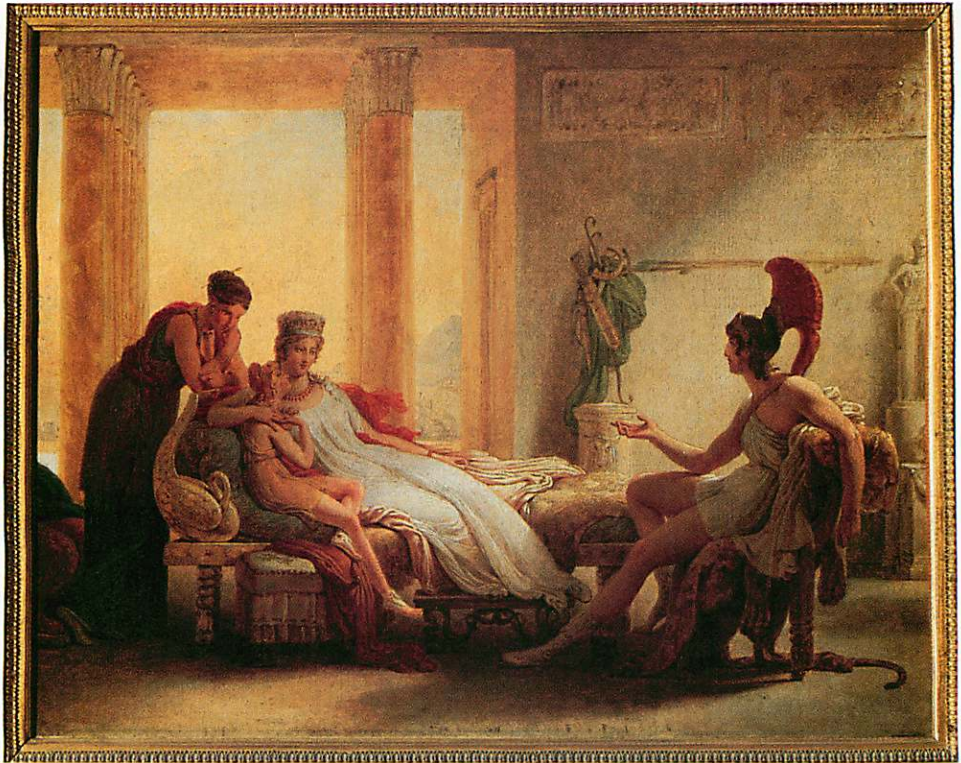
Scala/Art Resource, New York

And lovely as the lords of heaven know her.
Catching me by the hand, she held me back,
Then with her rose-red mouth reproved me:

'Son,

- 510 Why let such suffering goad you on to fury
Past control? Where is your thoughtfulness
For me, for us? Will you not first revisit
The place you left your father, worn and old,
Or find out if your wife, Creusa, lives,
And the young boy, Ascanius—all these
515 Cut off by Greek troops foraging everywhere?
Had I not cared for them, fire would by now
Have taken them, their blood glutted the sword.
You must not hold the woman of Laconia,^o
That hated face, the cause of this, nor Paris.
520 The harsh will of the gods it is, the gods,
That overthrows the splendor of this place
And brings Troy from her height into the dust.

518. **woman of Laconia**
(lə·kō'ně·ə): Helen.



AENEAS RECOUNTING TO DIDO THE FALL OF TROY, BARON PIERRE-NARCISSE GUÉRIN (1774–1833).

Scala/Art Resource, New York

Look over there: I'll tear away the cloud
 That curtains you, and films your mortal sight.
 525 The fog around you.—Have no fear of doing
 Your mother's will, or balk at obeying her.—
 Look: where you see high masonry thrown down,
 Stone torn from stone, with billowing smoke and dust,
 Neptune is shaking from their beds the walls
 530 That his great trident pried up, undermining,
 Toppling the whole city down. And look:
 Juno in all her savagery holds
 The Scaean Gates,^o and raging in steel armor
 Calls her allied army from the ships.
 535 Up on the citadel—turn, look—Pallas Tritonia^o
 Couched in a stormcloud, lightening, with her
 Gorgon!^o
 The Father^o himself empowers the Danaans,
 Urges assaulting gods on the defenders.
 Away, child; put an end to toiling so.
 540 I shall be near, to see you safely home.'
 She hid herself in the deep gloom of night,
 And now the dire forms appeared to me
 Of great immortals, enemies of Troy.
 I knew the end then: Ilium was going down
 545 In fire, the Troy of Neptune going down,
 As in high mountains when the countrymen
 Have notched an ancient ash, then make their axes
 Ring with might and main, chopping away
 To fell the tree—ever on the point of falling,
 550 Shaken through all its foliage, and the treetop
 Nodding; bit by bit the strokes prevail
 Until it gives a final groan at last
 And crashes down in ruin from the height.
 Now I descended where the goddess guided,
 555 Clear of the flames, and clear of enemies,
 For both retired; so gained my father's door,
 My ancient home.

533. **Scaean** (skē'ən) **Gates**: the northwest entry to Troy.

535. **Pallas Tritonia** (trə-tō'nē-ə): a name for Minerva; she was supposed to have been born near Lake Tritonis in Libya.

536. **Gorgon** (gôr'gən): Medusa, a terrifying monster slain by Perseus; her head was given to the goddess Minerva, who carried it upon her father's shield.

537. **Father**: Jupiter.

Arriving home, Aeneas finds his father, Anchises, resolved to die in the carnage of Troy. Unable to convince him to flee, he swears, despite his wife's piteous pleas, that he will join his father in death. Then he sees an omen that changes his mind.

She went on, and her wailing filled the house,
But then a sudden portent came, a marvel:
560 Amid his parents' hands and their sad faces
A point on Iulus' head seemed to cast light,
A tongue of flame that touched but did not burn him,
Licking his fine hair, playing round his temples.
We, in panic, beat at the flaming hair
565 And put the sacred fire out with water;
Father Anchises lifted his eyes to heaven
And lifted up his hands, his voice, in joy:

'Omnipotent Jupiter, if prayers affect you,
Look down upon us, that is all I ask,
570 If by devotion to the gods we earn it,
Grant us a new sign, and confirm this portent!
The old man barely finished when it thundered
A loud crack on the left. Out of the sky
Through depths of night a star fell trailing flame
575 And glided on, turning the night to day.
We watched it pass above the roof and go
To hide its glare, its trace, in Ida's^o wood;
But still, behind, the luminous furrow shone
And wide zones fumed with sulphur.

577. **Ida** (ɪ'də): a mountain near Troy, the setting for the Judgment of Paris.

Now indeed
580 My father, overcome, addressed the gods,
And rose in worship of the blessed star.

'Now, now, no more delay. I'll follow you.
Where you conduct me, there I'll be.

Gods of my fathers,
Preserve this house, preserve my grandson. Yours
585 This portent was. Troy's life is in your power.
I yield. I go as your companion, son.'
Then he was still. We heard the blazing town
Crackle more loudly, felt the scorching heat.

'Then come, dear father. Arms around my neck:
590 I'll take you on my shoulders, no great weight.
Whatever happens, both will face one danger,
Find one safety. Iulus will come with me,
My wife at a good interval behind.
Servants, give your attention to what I say.
595 At the gate inland there's a funeral mound
And an old shrine of Ceres the Bereft;^o

596. **Ceres the Bereft**: the mother of Proserpina (prō-sər'pī-nə), who was fated to spend part of the year in the underworld.

Near it an ancient cypress, kept alive
For many years by our fathers' piety.
By various routes we'll come to that one place.
600 Father, carry our hearthgods, our Penates.
It would be wrong for me to handle them—
Just come from such hard fighting, bloody work—
Until I wash myself in running water.'

When I had said this, over my breadth of shoulder
605 And bent neck, I spread out a lion skin
For tawny cloak and stooped to take his weight.
Then little Iulus put his hand in mine
And came with shorter steps beside his father.
My wife fell in behind. Through shadowed places
610 On we went, and I, lately unmoved
By any spears thrown, and squads of Greeks,
Felt terror now at every eddy of wind,
Alarm at every sound, alert and worried
Alike for my companion and my burden.
615 I had got near the gate, and now I thought
We had made it all the way, when suddenly
A noise of running feet came near at hand,
And peering through the gloom ahead, my father
Cried out:

'Run, boy; here they come; I see
620 Flame light on shields, bronze shining.'

I took fright,
And some unfriendly power, I know not what,
Stole all my addled wits—for as I turned
Aside from the known way, entering a maze
Of pathless places on the run—

Alas,

625 Creusa, taken from us by grim fate, did she
Linger, or stray, or sink in weariness?
There is no telling. Never would she be
Restored to us. Never did I look back
Or think to look for her, lost as she was,
630 Until we reached the funeral mound and shrine
Of venerable Ceres. Here at last
All came together, but she was not there;
She alone failed her friends, her child, her husband.
Out of my mind, whom did I not accuse,
635 What man or god? What crueler loss had I



Scala/Art Resource, New York

AENEAS AND ANCHISES, GIOVANNI LORENZO BERNINI (1598–1680).
Anchises holds a statue of the penates, or gods who protected household supplies in individual homes.



Alinari/Art Resource, New York

THE BURNING OF TROY, SIENA. The figure in the center of the painting is Creusa, or her ghost.

? How is Creusa significant to Aeneas's adventures?

Beheld, that night the city fell? Ascanius,
My father, and the Teucrian Penates,
I left in my friends' charge, and hid them well
In a hollow valley.

I turned back alone

640 Into the city, cinching my bright harness.
Nothing for it but to run the risks
Again, go back again, comb all of Troy,
And put my life in danger as before:
First by the town wall, then the gate, all gloom,

645 Through which I had come out—and so on backward,
Tracing my own footsteps through the night;
And everywhere my heart misgave me: even

Stillness had its terror. Then to our house,
Thinking she might, just might, have wandered there.
650 Danaans had got in and filled the place,
And at that instant fire they had set,
Consuming it, went roofward in a blast;
Flames leaped and seethed in heat to the night sky.
I pressed on, to see Priam's hall and tower.

655 In the bare colonnades of Juno's shrine
Two chosen guards, Phoenix° and hard Ulysses,
Kept watch over the plunder. Piled up here
Were treasures of old Troy from every quarter,
Torn out of burning temples: altar tables,
660 Robes, and golden bowls. Drawn up around them,
Boys and frightened mothers stood in line.

I even dared to call out in the night;
I filled the streets with calling; in my grief
Time after time I groaned and called Creusa,
665 Frantic, in endless quest from door to door.
Then to my vision her sad wraith° appeared—
Creusa's ghost, larger than life, before me.
Chilled to the marrow, I could feel the hair
On my head rise, the voice clot in my throat;
670 But she spoke out to ease me of my fear:

'What's to be gained by giving way to grief
So madly, my sweet husband? Nothing here
Has come to pass except as heaven willed.
You may not take Creusa with you now;
675 It was not so ordained, nor does the lord
Of high Olympus give you leave. For you
Long exile waits, and long sea miles to plow.
You shall make landfall on Hesperia°
Where Lydian Tiber° flows, with gentle pace,
680 Between rich farmlands, and the years will bear
Glad peace, a kingdom, and a queen for you.
Dismiss these tears for your beloved Creusa.
I shall not see the proud homelands of Myrmidons
Or of Dolopians, or go to serve
685 Greek ladies, Dardan lady that I am
And daughter-in-law of Venus the divine.
No: the great mother of the gods detains me
Here on these shores. Farewell now; cherish still
Your son and mine.'

656. **Phoenix** (fē'niks)

666. **wraith** (rāth): ghost.

678. **Hesperia** (hes-pir'ē-ə): name given to Italy by Aeneas.

679. **Lydian** (lid'ē-ən) **Tiber**: The Etruscans were supposed to have come from Lydia, a region in Asia Minor.

With this she left me weeping,
690 Wishing that I could say so many things,
And faded on the tenuous air. Three times
I tried to put my arms around her neck,
Three times enfolded nothing, as the wraith
Slipped through my fingers, bodiless as wind,
695 Or like a flitting dream.

So in the end
As night waned I rejoined my company.
And there to my astonishment I found
New refugees in a great crowd: men and women
Gathered for exile, young—pitiful people
700 Coming from every quarter, minds made up,
With their belongings, for whatever lands
I'd lead them to by sea.

The morning star
Now rose on Ida's ridges, bringing day.
Greeks had secured the city gates. No help
705 Or hope of help existed.
So I resigned myself, picked up my father,
And turned my face toward the mountain range."



A CRITICAL COMMENT

Themes and Images in Book 2 of the Aeneid

The full force of Virgil's narrative lies not in its focus on descriptive details, but rather in the personal response of Aeneas to the advancing tragedy. Aeneas's thirst for revenge comes into conflict with his duties as a survivor and with the pronouncements of fate. These conflicts recur throughout the *Aeneid*, constituting central themes of the epic.

At the beginning of the enemy attack, the sleeping Aeneas has a vision of the slain Trojan hero Hector, who urges him to escape the holocaust and save the sacred treasures of the city. However, it is only when Aeneas climbs to the roof of his house and sees the fires engulfing the homes of his friends that he grasps the full magnitude of the Greek assault. His first

reaction is blind rage: he can think only of throwing himself into the flames or giving himself over to revenge to quench his own fury.

In what follows, Virgil repeatedly emphasizes the idea of wasted valor. First the young Coroebus throws away his life in a failed attempt to save his beloved Cassandra. Then, in the ensuing fight, Aeneas's small band of warriors are cut down by the missiles of their own countrymen. Finally, Aeneas returns to the palace of Priam and witnesses in helpless outrage the brutal killing of the feeble, broken king.

At this point, Aeneas's thoughts turn to his own family, and he begins to accept the awesome responsibility of the survivor as something greater than his overpowering desire for revenge. Virgil here emphasizes another central theme of his epic: the problem of fate and free will. On his way back to save his family, Aeneas comes face to face with Helen—the cause, from his point of view, of the entire war. He is about to vent his fury on her when his mother Venus stays his hand. Venus gives Aeneas a powerful display of the divine forces orchestrating the destruction of Troy—forces that are far beyond any factors of human guilt and retribution.

The debate over individual responsibility is resumed when Aeneas returns to his family. This time it is his father Anchises who nearly melts Aeneas's own resolve, until he is swayed by a startling portent: the image of flickering flames around the head of his own son, followed by a meteor

pointing the way to safety. Aeneas is now ready to shoulder the burden of his past and future destiny as he sets off, carrying his father on his back and leading his young son by the hand.

As we begin to understand as early as Book 2, the power of "destiny" or "fate" is not simply a matter of resignation by Aeneas to the rule of unseen powers. Instead, destiny calls forth even greater force of will and commitment on the part of the hero. This is precisely the idea of self-mastery that is expressed by the epithet *pius* (variously translated as "pious," "responsible," "dutiful," "conscientious") attached to the name of Aeneas throughout the poem. This heroic quality occasionally gives Aeneas the strength to overcome external enemies, but more often it puts him into conflict with himself. Aeneas's internal conflicts set up some of the emotional high points of the poem. These conflicts come into focus as the hero gives himself over to indulgence of his love for Dido in Book 4, his weariness in Book 5, and his obsessive revenge in Book 12.

Many of the themes and images developed in Book 2 reverberate throughout the whole epic. For example, the shared tragedy of fathers and sons is a pattern that repeatedly unfolds in Books 9 to 12. The sense of the awesome power of fate recurs with particular force in the prophetic vision in the underworld in Book 6, and again in the pageant of Roman history engraved on Aeneas's divine shield in Book 8.

First Thoughts

How did you react to the violence in Aeneas's account of the fall of Troy?

Identifying Facts

1. Why do the Trojans assume that the Greeks have sailed for home? How do they interpret the death of Laocoon?
2. What is Priam's fate? How is Helen saved from Aeneas's fury?
3. What signs convince Aeneas and Anchises that they must leave Troy?
4. At what point does Aeneas realize that his wife is gone? What is Creusa's parting message to Aeneas?

Interpreting Meanings

1. What strengths make Aeneas a leader of his people? What weaknesses does Virgil reveal in his epic hero?
2. The narrative in Book 2 clearly portrays Aeneas's **external conflicts** with the Greeks. He experiences **internal conflict** when he witnesses Priam's death. Find at least two other examples of internal conflict. What is the outcome of each conflict?
3. Although the title character of Virgil's epic is a man, the poem is deeply concerned with female characters. How do Cassandra, Hecuba, Venus, and Creusa play important roles in the poem?
4. Like Homer, Virgil uses **epic similes**, or extended comparisons in which epic events are likened to ordinary events in order to make them more accessible or interesting to the reader. Identify two examples of epic similes and explain what makes them vivid and exciting.

Applying Meanings

How do you rate Aeneas as a leader? If you were a Trojan refugee, would you follow him? Why or why not?

Critical Writing Response

Comparing Heroes. In a three- to four-paragraph essay, compare and contrast Aeneas with one of the heroes you have read about in this book or with a modern hero from television or film. Consider:

1. The nature of their quests
2. The use of their intelligence, physical strength, or special powers
3. Their acceptance of aid from others
4. Their loyalties
5. Their attitudes toward violence

Language and Vocabulary

Analyzing an Epic Simile

Reread lines 273–279 from Book 2, in which Aeneas describes his companions' and his own desperation as they rush to make a final stand against the Greeks. Then compare these lines with the following paraphrase:

From that time on, while black night enveloped us, we ran straight for the heart of the city, toward our certain death, moving through flights of arrows and enemy troops, in the same way that preying wolves run in fog and darkness when they are driven recklessly on by fierce hunger and their starving cubs lie waiting in lairs.

This paraphrase conveys the meaning of the passage from the epic, but not its emotional impact.

1. How does Virgil organize the elements of the comparison so that his simile builds to a climax?
2. Which images are particularly effective in communicating the desperate emotional state of Aeneas and his small band of Trojans?