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## **Text Commentary Project**

### **Vergil, *Aeneid*: II.771-795**

#### **Introduction**

The work of the Augustan poet Publius Vergilius Maro left a profound mark on Roman literature. He was born on October 15, 70 BC, near Mantua, Italy, the son of a wealthy farmer whose land was confiscated by Octavian for his veteran soldiers after the Battle of Philippi in 42 BC. In the mid-30s BC, Vergil published his first work, the *Eclogues*, also called *Bucolics*. This poem in ten books reflects the peace that comes from farm life and, on a deeper level, the current political situation in Rome. Not long afterward he was invited by Maecenas to enter the literary circle around Octavian. Under Octavian's patronage he wrote the *Georgics*, a poem in four books that focused on the logistical aspects of managing a farm. In 29 BC, at the urging of Augustus, Vergil began what has been called the national epic of Rome: the *Aeneid*. It chronicles the journey of the Trojan prince Aeneas as he follows his destiny to establish the Roman nation. Upon his deathbed, Vergil requested that his unfinished manuscript be burned, but after his death on September 21, 19 BC, it was published.

When Vergil began writing the *Aeneid* in 29 BC, Rome was experiencing a period of peace after decades of civil war, brought to an end in 31 BC by Octavian's defeat of Mark Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium. The doors of the Temple of Janus were closed for the first time in 200 years. In 27 BC, the Senate bestowed upon Octavian the title *Augustus*.

Vergil's *Aeneid* develops the theme of the divinely guided destiny of Rome in 12 books: 1-6 describe Aeneas' journey to Italy, 7-12 describe the war in Latium. It is layered with themes of the inexorable nature of human suffering, the conflict between duty and desire, and the arbitrary cruelty of the gods. In the passage below Aeneas ceases to defend Troy after warnings from Venus and Hector. He escapes the burning city with his family: his son Ascanius, his father Anchises holding the Trojan Penates, and his wife Creusa. When he arrives at the shrine of Ceres, Aeneas notices that Creusa is no longer following him. Retracing his steps, he encounters her ghost, who urges him to leave her and follow his destiny.

### **Reflection**

Over the course of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas struggles between *pietas* and *furor*, and several characters influence his growth into the Roman hero whose virtue is his enduring mindfulness of his family, his country, and his divine mandate. *Pietas* demands that one actively serve the gods, fatherland, and family before oneself; the opposite of *pietas* is *furor*, a raging selfish passion and loss of control. The selected passage is an important one. In it Aeneas' wife Creusa, unlike the warriors Camilla and Juturna or Queen Dido, is portrayed as a model for the Roman *matron*, instructing him to follow the course of *pietas*. Her ghost lessens Aeneas' frenzy at her loss, reminding him of his duty and foretelling his future: the long voyages he will endure, the kingdom he will establish, and the wife awaiting him in the West.

Creusa serves as a model for Aeneas of the *pietas* she urges. Her first words are those of comfort and concern, and she goes on to instruct him *lacrimas dilectae pelle Creusae* (Vergil 2.784). Creusa places personal attachment aside and instead encourages him to do the same by accepting his role as leader of the Trojan remnants.

Even Creusa's final words to her husband project into the future, developing Aeneas' heroic characteristics by insisting that he preserve their love for Ascanius, a symbol of the future and of Rome itself. Throughout the epic Aeneas develops "the stoic virtues of patience, resignation, submissiveness to fate, duty, and civic responsibility" (Forbes para 10) as a result of this conversation with Creusa. Not only in the words that she speaks, but in her appearance itself, Creusa facilitates Aeneas' *pietas*. She is described as an image larger than life, and yet the emotionally distraught Aeneas cannot grab hold of his wife, the symbol of Roman ideals. His attempts to grasp her are in vain (*frustra*, 793) as they neither adhere to his fate nor allow him to place his personal needs behind that of his men. Even Creusa's ghost and her prophecy are "no compensation for the human companion he desperately misses, and he remains inconsolable in his sorrowful lament" (Franke para 6). However, though he remains grieving when she leaves (*lacrimantem*, 790), his encounter with Creusa changes something in the man: "The death of an 'innocent' woman... Creusa, legitimates the epic hero's violent mission: over her dead body, he regenerates or transforms the social order" (Keith 149). The passage ends with an abrupt statement of fact, in contrast to Aeneas' emotional response, giving the reader a sense of Aeneas' stoic acceptance of his mission.

Creusa magnifies Aeneas' *pietas*, his stoicism, and his heroism because she refocuses his attention on his destiny and on the future of his people. Additionally, Creusa's death heightens the reader's awareness of the personal loss Aeneas must endure even as her ghost urges Aeneas to move past his grief. Creusa prepares Aeneas for his future and ensures that her husband will follow his *pietas* and live out his destiny.

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**Latin Text: Aeneid II.771-795**

Quaerenti et tectis urbis sine fine ruenti  
 infelix simulacrum atque ipsius umbra Creusae  
 visa mihi ante oculos et nota maior imago.  
 obstipui, steteruntque comae et vox faucibus haesit.

775

tum sic adfari et curas his demere dictis:  
 'quid tantum insano iuvat indulgere dolori,  
 o dulcis coniunx? non haec sine numine divum  
 eveniunt; nec te comitem hinc portare Creusam  
 fas, aut ille sinit superi regnator Olympi.  
 longa tibi exsilia et vastum maris aequor arandum,

780

et terram Hesperiam venies, ubi Lydius arva  
 inter opima virum leni fluit agmine Thybris.  
 illic res laetae regnumque et regia coniunx  
 parta tibi; lacrimas dilectae pelle Creusae.  
 non ego Myrmidonum sedes Dolopumve superbas

785

aspiciam aut Graias servitum matribus ibo,  
 Dardanias et divae Veneris nurus;  
 sed me magna deum genetrix his detinet oris.  
 iamque vale et nati serva communis amorem.'  
 haec ubi dicta dedit, lacrimantem et multa volentem

790

dicere deseruit, tenuisque recessit in auras.  
 ter conatus ibi collo dare brachia circum;  
 ter frustra compressa manus effugit imago,  
 par levibus ventis volucrique simillima somno.  
 sic demum socios consumpta nocte reviso.

**Constructions, Grammar, & Rhetorical Devices:**

- *tectis* (771): supply *in*; ablative of place where. Note the synecdoche, as usual with *tectum*.
- *sine fine* (771): creates the aural imagery of stuttering.
- *Quaerenti... ruenti* (771): homeoteleuton, as also in *sine fine* (771). The repetition of “t” sounds here and in line 774 gives the reader a sense of Aeneas’ fear.
- *infelix* (772): transferred epithet because, though it grammatically modifies *simulacrum*, it refers to Creusa in meaning (see Notes section for more information). Vergil emphasizes the supernatural with three different words describing Creusa’s apparition: *simulacrum* (772); *umbra* (772) and *imago* (773).
- *nota* (773): ablative of comparison.
- *visa (est)* (773): agrees with its closest subject.

- *adfari...demere* (775): historical infinitives.
- *dolori* (776): dative with compound verb *indulgere*.
- *Quid* (776): take as *cur*.
- *Non...sine numine* (776): litotes.
- *regnator* (779): i.e. Jupiter.
- *arandum* (780): supply *est*, the form a passive periphrastic.
- *regia coniunx* (783): refers to Lavinia, daughter of King Latinus of Latium; Creusa thus gives Aeneas her blessing to move on from their relationship.
- *parta* (784): supply *erit*; it is in agreement with its closest subject.
- *sedes...superbas* (785): transferred epithet.
- *servitum* (786): accusative of the supine after a verb of motion (*ibo*); syntax: purpose.
- *vale* (789): translates to “be strong” or “farewell”
  - Our translation choice in “farewell” displays Creusa's wishing Aeneas obvious good luck, but also acts as final parting words for the two.
- Note the strong alliteration of *d* and *t* in lines 790-791: *Haec ubi dicta dedit, lacrimantem et multa volentem / dicere deseruit, tenuisque recessit in auras*. Note the effect of the sound pattern.
- *dare... circum* (792): tmesis.
- *conatus* (792): supply *sum*.
- *ter...ter* (792-793): anaphora.
- *ventis* (794): dative with the adjective *par* (794).
- *somno* (794): dative with the superlative adjective *simillima* (794).
- *consumpta nocte* (795): ablative absolute.

### Vocabulary:

- *adfor, adfari, adfatus sum*: address, accost
- *aro, arare, aravi, aratus*: plow, till
- *coma, comae*: (f) hair, locks, tresses
- *Creusa, Creusae*: (f) Creusa, the wife of Aeneas
- *Dardanis, Dardanidis*: (f) Trojan woman
- *demo, demere, dempsi, demptus*: remove, take away
- *diligo, ere, lexi, lectus*: love, cherish
- *Dolopes, um*: (m) Greeks of Thessaly
- *fas*: (n.) right, justice, divine law
- *fauces, faucium*: (f) jaws, throat; entrance
- *haereo, haerere, haesi, haeseus*: stick, cling (to)
- *Hesperius, a, um*: Hesperian, western, Italian
- *imago, imaginis*: (f) image, phantom, likeness
- *indulgeo, indulgere, indulsi, indultus*: indulge in, yield to (takes the dative case)

- *Lydius, a, um*: Lydian, of Lydia, a country in Asia Minor and, reputedly, the original home of the Etruscans
- *Myrmidones, um*: Greeks of Thessaly
- *obstipesco, obstipescere, obstipui*: be dazed, stand agape
- *pario, ere, peperit, partus*: acquire, win, produce
- *pello, ere, pepuli, pulsus*: dismiss, drive (away)
- *servio, servire, servivi, servitus*: be a slave, serve (takes the dative case)
- *simulacrum, simulacri*: (n) image, phantom, likeness
- *sine*: without (takes the ablative case)
- *Thybris, Thybr(id)is*: (m) Tiber, a river of Italy

#### Notes:

- *ruenti* (771) comes from *ruo, ruere*, which was used to describe the storm scene (I.85). Vergil thus infuses Aeneas' search for Creusa with a sense of extreme chaos.
- *infelix* (772) is often used in other contexts to describe the dead since its root meaning connects it with fertility and productiveness. A tree that bears no fruit is sometimes called *infelix*. An unpromising omen is also *infelix*.
- note the diction of *comitem* (778) as opposed to *coniugem*, wife; the word suggests a socially convenient relationship lacking personal attachment.
- *fas* (779) is etymologically connected to *fatum*, as Creusa emphasizes that Aeneas' mission is divinely guided.
- Creusa is the first to articulate to Aeneas his final destination (*Hesperiam*, 781).
- *non ego.... aspiciam* (785-786): Creusa reassures Aeneas that she will not be captured and enslaved to enemy Greeks.
- *genetrix* (788) refers to Mt. Ida close to Troy.
  - Reference to Cybele, the mother goddess, whose trees will be used for wood in building Aeneas' ships.
- Creusa's focus on Ascanius, *nati communis* (789), manifests her focus on the future of Troy, which Ascanius symbolizes.
- the detail that Aeneas is weeping (*lacrimantem*, 790) underscores the contrast between Aeneas' passionate *furor* and Creusa's stoicism.
  - She, not Aeneas (the hero of the epic), epitomizes traditional Roman values in this instance.
- Aeneas' physical response to Creusa's ghost (790-794) mimics his response to Hector's ghost earlier in Book II (279-280). These lines occur again in *Aeneid* 6.700-702, when Aeneas tries to embrace the shade of his father, Anchises. This is an important epic convention in Homer: *Iliad* 23.99-101 (Achilles vainly trying to embrace the shade of Patroclus) and *Odyssey* 11.205-208 (Odysseus trying to embrace the shade of his mother, Anticleia).

### Translation

As I was seeking and rushing in the buildings of the city without end, the unlucky likeness and the ghost of Creusa herself, and an image greater than known, appeared before my eyes. I stood agape and my hair stood on end and my voice stuck in my throat. Then she addressed me in such a way and took away my anxieties with these words:

“Why does it help you to indulge so much in frantic grief, O sweet husband? These things do not happen without the divine will of the gods; neither is it divinely right for you to bring Creusa as a comrade henceforth, nor does that one, the ruler of high Olympus, permit it. Long exiles and the vast plain of the sea must be tilled by you, and you will come to the Hesperian land, where the Lydian Tiber flows in a gentle line among the fertile fields of men. There joyful events and a kingdom and a royal wife will be acquired by you; dismiss your tears for beloved Creusa. I myself will neither see the proud homes of the Myrmidones or the Dolopes, nor go to serve Greek mothers, I, a Trojan woman and daughter-in-law of divine Venus; rather, the great mother of the gods detains me on these shores. And now farewell and preserve the love for the son we share.”

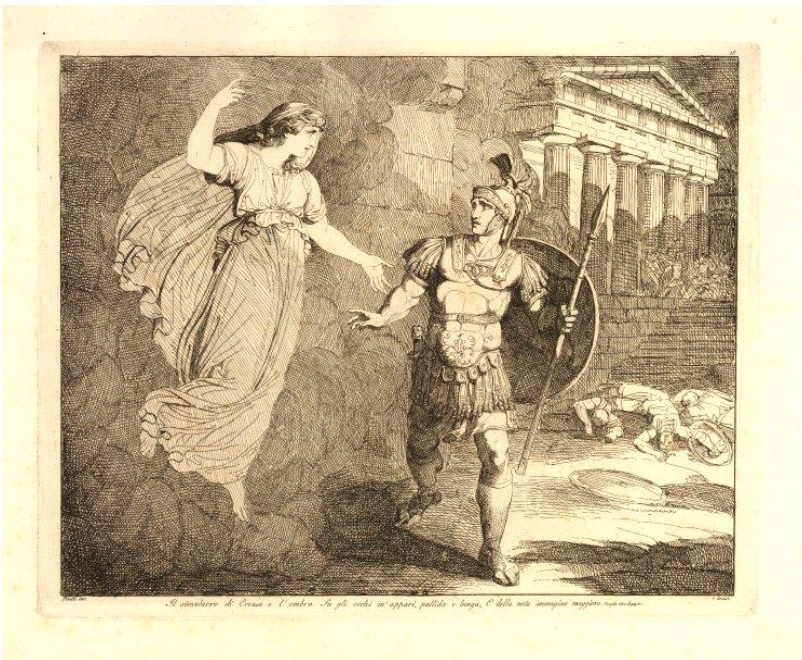
When she said these words, she deserted me, weeping and wishing to say many things, and she departed into thin air. Then three times I tried to place my arms around her neck, three times her image, having been grasped in vain, escaped my hands like light winds and very similar to swift sleep. Thus I finally rejoin my comrades, the night having been consumed.



## Illustrations of Vergil, *Aeneid* II.771-795



This painting illustrates Aeneas' departure from Troy as it burns. Aeneas is in the center, carrying his father, Anchises, who holds the Penates, over his shoulder. His son, Ascanius, is to his right, and his wife, Creusa, is to his left.



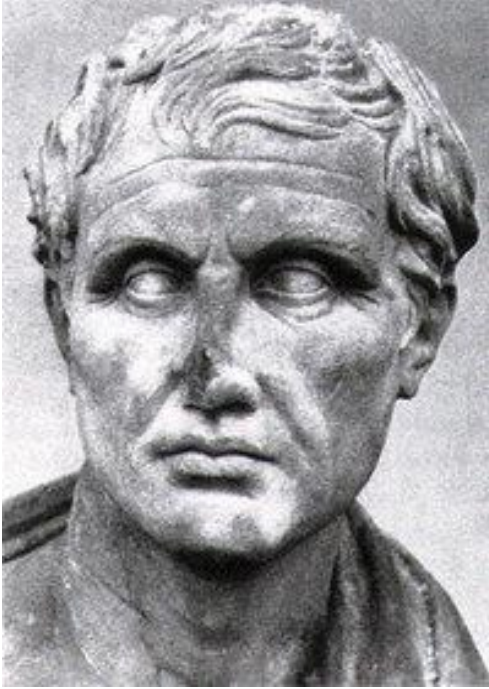
In this scene Creusa's shade visits Aeneas and urges him to leave Troy. Here, she is covered in clouds, floating, and Aeneas appears troubled by her appearance.



This painting is another interpretation of the scene depicted in the picture above. However, this image also includes the famous Greek warrior, Ulysses, in the top right corner.



This painting represents Aeneas' flight from Troy, pictured with his father, Anchises, over his shoulder, holding his son and followed by Creusa.



This marble bust is possibly of Publius Vergilius Maro, the author of the *Aeneid*.



This marble statue, on display in the Vatican Museum, is called the *Prima Porta*. It represents Augustus as Commander in Chief.



This marble seated woman portrays Agrippina with her son Nero as a traditional Roman matron.



This scene from a Greek black-figure vase shows Aeneas' flight from Troy with his father seated on his back holding the Palladium; only the legs of Ascanius are visible.



This marble relief of female fertility is found on the *Ara Pacis*, a monument dedicated by the Senate to Augustus in 13 BCE honoring him as the author of imperial peace.

