

The Final Hours of Troy

Adapted from Book Two of Virgil's *Aeneid*

Translated by Robert Fagles

Tim McDonough
Theater Emory
Draft 3 May 30, 2007

Ensemble***Men*****A** (Laocoön)**B** (Priam)**C** (Pyrrhus)**D** (Anchises)**Aeneas*****Women*****1** (Dido, Hecuba)**2** (Helen, Servant)**3** (Venus)**4** (Creusa)

1: Dido

Now is the seventh summer that you have wandered
all the lands and seas on earth.

Tell us your own story, Aeneas,
start to finish - the ambush laid by the Greeks,
the pain your people suffered.

4

Silence. All fell hushed, their eyes fixed on Aeneas.

Aeneas

Sorrow, unspeakable sorrow,
you ask me to bring to life once more,

4

how the Greeks uprooted Troy in all her power,

B

our kingdom mourned forever.

Aeneas

What horrors I saw,
a tragedy where I played a leading role myself.

A

Who could tell such things - not even iron-hearted Ulysses -
and still refrain from tears?

D

And now, too,
the dank night is sweeping down from the sky

and the setting stars incline our heads to sleep.

Aeneas

But if you long so deeply to know what we went through,
to hear, in brief, the last great agony of Troy,
much as I shudder at the memory of it all,
we'll try to tell it now ...

C

Ground down by the war and driven back by Fate,
the Greek captains had watched the years slip by – until,

3

helped by Athena's superhuman skill,

A

they built that mammoth horse,

2

immense as a mountain,

20

C

lining its ribs with ship timbers hewn from pine.

3

An offering to secure safe passage home,

A

or so they pretend,

2

and the story spreads through Troy.

C

But they pick by lot the best, most able-bodied men
 and stealthily lock them into the horse's dark flanks
 till the vast hold of the monster's womb is packed
 with soldiers bristling weapons.

1

Just in sight of Troy

an island rises, Tenedos, famed in the old songs,
 powerful, rich, while Priam's realm stood fast.

B

Now it's only a bay, a treacherous cove for ships.

30

1

Well there they sail, hiding out on its lonely coast
 while we thought - gone!

3

Sped home on the winds to Greece.

1

So all Troy breathes free, relieved of her endless sorrow.

2

We fling open the gates and stream out, elated to see
 the Greeks' abandoned camp, the deserted beachhead.

B

Here savage Achilles pitched his tents -

3

Here his soldiers formed ranks -

A

Over there the armada moored -

2

and here the familiar killing-fields of battle.

Some gaze wonderstruck at the gift for Athena,

the virgin never wed - transfixed by the horse,

40

its looming mass, our doom.

'Drag it inside the walls, plant it high

on the city heights!

B

'Fling it into the sea or torch the thing to ash

or bore into the depths of its womb where men can hide!

1

The common people are split into warring factions.

3

But now, out in the lead with a troop of comrades,

50

down Laocoön runs from the heights in full fury,

calling out from a distance:

A: Laocoön

Poor doomed fools,

have you gone mad, you Trojans?

You really believe the enemy's sailed away? Or any gift of
the Greeks is free of guile?

Is that how well you know Ulysses? Trust me,
either the Greeks are hiding, shut inside those beams,
or the horse is a battle-engine geared to breach our walls,
spy on our homes, come down on our city, overwhelm us -
or some other deception's lurking deep inside it.

60

Trojans, never trust that horse. Whatever it is,
I fear the Greeks, especially bearing gifts.'

D

In that spirit, with all his might he hurled
a huge spear straight into the monster's flanks,
the mortised timberwork of its swollen belly.
Quivering, there it stuck, and the stricken womb
came booming back from its depths with echoing groans.

1

If Fate and our own wits had not gone against us,
surely Laocoön would have driven us on, now,
to rip the Greek lair open with iron spears
and Troy would still be standing -
proud fortress of Priam, you would tower still!

70

A: Laocoön

But a new portent strikes our doomed people
Now - a greater omen, far more terrible, fatal,

shakes our senses, blind to what was coming.

I cringe to recall it now - look there!

3

Over the calm deep straits off Tenedos swim

twin, giant serpents, rearing in coils, breasting

the sea-swell side by side,

2

plunging toward the shore,

their heads, their blood-red crests surging over the waves,

their bodies thrashing, backs rolling in coil on mammoth coil

1

and the wake behind them churns in a roar of foaming spray,

A: Laocoön

and now, their eyes glittering, shot with blood and fire,

flickering tongues licking their hissing maws, yes, now

they're about to land.

B

We blanch at the sight, we scatter.

270

Like troops on attack they're heading straight for Laocoön -

first each serpent seizes one of his small young sons,

constricting, twisting around him, sinks its fangs

in the tortured limbs, and gorges.

A: Laocoön

Next Laocoön,

rushing quick to the rescue, clutching his sword –
 they trap him, bind him in huge muscular whorls,
 their scaly backs lashing around his midriff twice
 and twice around his throat –

3

their heads, their flaring necks
 mounting over their victim writhing still, his hands
 frantic to wrench apart their knotted trunks,

280

2

and all the while his horrible screaming fills the skies,
 bellowing like some wounded bull struggling to shrug
 loose from his neck an axe that's struck awry.

1

Only the twin snakes escape, sliding off and away
 to the heights of Troy where the ruthless goddess
 holds her shrine, and there at her feet they hide,
 vanishing under Athena's great round shield.

A

At once, I tell you, a stranger fear runs through the harrowed crowd. 290

3

'Laocoön deserved to pay for his outrage.'

2

'He desecrated the sacred timbers of the horse –'

A

'He hurled his wicked lance at the beast's belly.'

2

'Haul Athena's effigy up to her house!'

3

'Offer up our prayers to the power of the goddess!'

B

We breach our own ramparts, fling our defenses open,
 all pitch into the work. Smooth running rollers
 we wheel beneath its hoofs, and heavy hempen ropes
 we bind around its neck, and teeming with men-at-arms
 the huge deadly engine climbs toward our city walls . . .

300

4

And round it boys and unwed girls sing hymns,
 thrilled to lay a hand on the dangling ropes
 as on and on it comes, gliding into the city,
 looming high over the city's heart.

Aeneas

Oh my country!

You great walls of Troy long renowned in war!

D

Four times it lurched to a halt - four times the armor
 clashed out from its womb.

A

But we, we forged ahead,
 oblivious, blind, insane, we stationed the monster
 fraught with doom on the hallowed heights of Troy. 310

3

Even now Cassandra revealed the future, opening
 lips the gods had ruled no Trojan would believe.

1

And we, poor fools – on this, our last day – we deck
 the shrines of the gods with green holiday garlands
 all throughout the city . . .

4

But all the while
 the skies keep wheeling on and night comes sweeping in
 from the Ocean Stream, in its mammoth shadow swallowing up
 the earth, and the Pole Star, and the treachery of the Greeks.
 Dead quiet. The Trojans slept on, strewn throughout
 their fortress, weary bodies embraced by slumber. 320

C: Pyrrhus

But the Greek armada was under way now, crossing
 over from Tenedos, ships in battle formation
 under the moon's quiet light, their silent ally,
 homing in on the berths they know by heart –
 when the king's flagship sends up a signal flare,

unleashes the Greeks shut up inside its womb.

D

The horse stands open wide, fighters in high spirits

pouring out of its timbered cavern into the fresh air:

330

C

Thessandrus,

4

Sthenelus,

C

ruthless Ulysses rappeling down a rope they dropped from its side,

D

and Acamas,

4

Thoas,

C: Pyrrhus

Pyrrhus, son of Achilles,

4

captain Machaon,

C

Menelaus,

D

Epeus himself, the man who built that masterpiece of fraud.

C: Pyrrhus

They steal on a city buried deep in sleep and wine,

4

they butcher the guards, fling wide the gates and hug

their cohorts poised to combine forces.

C: Pyrrhus

Plot complete.

1

This was the hour when rest, that gift of the gods

most heaven-sent, first comes to beleaguered mortals,

340

creeping over us now . . .

B

But now, chaos –

the city begins to reel with cries of grief, louder, stronger,

the clash of arms rings clearer, horror on the attack.

Aeneas

I shake off sleep and scrambling up to the pitched roof

380

I stand there, ears alert, and I hear a roar like fire

assaulting a wheatfield, whipped by a Southwind's fury –

D

or mountain torrent in full spate, flattening crops,

dragging whole trees headlong down in its wake –

2

and a shepherd perched on a sheer rock outcrop
hears the roar, lost in amazement, struck dumb.

Aeneas

No doubting the good faith of the Greeks now,
their treachery plain as day.

A

Already, there,
the grand house of Deiphobus stormed by fire,
crashing in ruins -

390

3

Already his neighbor Ucalegon up in flames -

C: Pyrrhus

The shouting of fighters soars, the clashing blare of trumpets.

Aeneas

Out of my wits, I seize my arms - what reason for arms?

Just my spirit burning to muster troops for battle,

rush with comrades up to the city's heights,

fury and rage driving me breakneck on

as it races through my mind

what a noble thing it is to die in arms!

B

The immense double gates are flung wide open,

Greeks in their thousands mass there, all who ever
sailed from proud Mycenae.

3

Others have choked
the cramped streets, weapons brandished now
in a battle line of naked, glinting steel
tense for the kill.

D

Only the first guards 420
at the gates put up some show of resistance,
fighting blindly on.'

2

Who has words to capture that night's disaster,
tell that slaughter? What tears could match
our torments now? An ancient city is falling,
a power that ruled for ages, now in ruins.
Everywhere lie the motionless bodies of the dead,
strewn in her streets, her homes and the gods' shrines
we held in awe. And not only Trojans pay the price in blood -
at times the courage races back in their conquered hearts
and they cut their enemies down in all their triumph. 460
Everywhere, wrenching grief, everywhere, terror
and a thousand shapes of death.

Aeneas

Into the blaze I dive, into the fray, wherever
 the din of combat breaks and war cries fill the sky, wherever the
 battle-fury drives me on and now

I'm joined by Rhipeus,

1

Epytus mighty in armor, rearing up in the moonlight -

Aeneas

Hypanis comes to my side,

A

and Dymas too,

4

flanked by the young Coroebus, Mygdon's son.

430

Aeneas

Seeing their close-packed ranks, hot for battle,
 I spur them on their way: 'Men, brave hearts,
 though bravery cannot save us - if you're bent on
 following me and risking all to face the worst,
 look around you, see how our chances stand.

The gods who shored our empire up have left us,

440

all have deserted their altars and their shrines.

You race to defend a city already lost in flames.

But let us die, go plunging into the thick of battle.

One hope saves the defeated: they know they can't be saved!

1

That fired our hearts with the fury of despair.

Now like a wolfpack out for blood on a foggy night,

driven blindly on by relentless, rabid hunger,

leaving cubs behind, waiting, jaws parched –

so through spears, through enemy ranks we plow

to certain death, striking into the city's heart,

450

the shielding wings of the darkness beating round us.

4

And on we forge, fighting hand-to-hand in the blind dark

and many Greeks we send to the King of Death.

A

Some scatter back to their ships, making a run

for shore and safety.

2

Others disgrace themselves,

so panicked they clamber back inside the monstrous horse,

500

burying into the womb they know so well.

B

But, oh

how wrong to rely on gods dead set against you!

3

Watch: the virgin daughter of Priam, Cassandra,
 torn from the sacred depths of Athena's shrine,
 dragged by the hair, raising her burning eyes
 to the heavens, just her eyes, so helpless,
 shackles kept her from raising her gentle hands.

4

Coroebus could not bear the sight of it - mad with rage
 he flung himself at the Greek lines.

1

Closing ranks we charge after him, into the thick of battle. 510

In a flash, superior numbers overwhelm us.

C

Coroebus is first to go,
 cut down by Peneleus' right hand he sprawls 530
 at Athena's shrine, the goddess, power of armies.

B

Rhipeus falls too, the most righteous man in Troy,
 the most devoted to justice, true, but the gods
 had other plans.

D

Hypanis, Dymas die as well.

Aeneas

Ashes of Troy, last flames that engulfed my world -

I swear by you that in your last hour I never shrank

from the Greek spears, from any startling hazard of war - 540

if Fate had struck me down, my sword-arm earned it all.

D

Now we are swept away, heading straight

for Priam's palace, driven there by the outcries.

C

And there, I tell you, a pitched battle flares!

You'd think no other battles could match its fury,

nowhere else in the city were people dying so.

B

Invincible Mars rears up to meet us face-to-face

with waves of Greeks, we see them 550

choking the gateway, scrambling up the rungs of scaling ladders

under a tortoise-shell of shields.

A

Over against them, Trojans ripping the tiles

and turrets from all their roofs - the end is near, they can see it now,

at the brink of death, desperate

for weapons, some defense, and these, these missiles they send

reeling down on the Greeks' heads - the gilded beams, 560

the inlaid glory of all our ancient fathers.

4

Comrades below, posted in close-packed ranks,
block the entries, swordpoints drawn and poised.

Aeneas

My courage renewed, I rush to relieve the palace,
brace the defenders, bring the defeated strength.

2

There was a secret door, a hidden passage
linking the wings of Priam's house - remote,
far to the rear. Long as our realm still stood,
Hector's wife Andromache, poor woman, would often go this way,
unattended, to Hector's parents, taking the boy
Astyanax by the hand to see grandfather Priam.

570

Aeneas

I slipped through the door, up to the jutting roof
where the doomed Trojans were hurling futile spears.

D

There was a tower soaring high at the peak toward the sky,
our favorite vantage point for surveying all of Troy
and the Greek fleet and camp. We attacked that tower
with iron crowbars, just where the upper-story planks
showed loosening joints - we rocked it, wrenched it free
of its deep moorings and all at once we heaved it toppling
down with a crash.

580

3

But on came Greek reserves, assaulting left and right, no letup,
the hail of rocks, the missiles of every kind would never cease.

C: Pyrrhus

There at the very edge of the front gates
springs Pyrrhus, son of Achilles, prancing in arms,
aflash in his shimmering brazen sheath like a snake
buried the whole winter long under frozen turf,
and now it springs into light, sloughing its old skin
to glisten sleek in its newfound youth, 590
its proud chest rearing high to the sun,
its triple tongue flickering through its fangs.

Pyrrhus seizes a double-axe and hacks
the rugged oaken planks of the doors, 600
makes a breach, a gaping maw,

1

and there, exposed, the heart of the house,

4

the sweep of the colonnades,

A

the palace depths of old King Priam,

C: Pyrrhus

and they see the armed sentries bracing
at the entry to the next portal.

B

But all in the house is turmoil, misery, groans,
 the echoing chambers ring with cries of women,
 wails of mourning hit the golden stars.

Mothers scatter in panic down the palace halls
 and embrace the pillars, cling to them, kiss them hard.

C: Pyrrhus

But on he comes, Pyrrhus with all his father's force, 610
 no bolts, not even the guards can hold him back -
 under the ram's repeated blows the doors cave in.

D

Force makes a breach and the Greeks come storming through,
 butcher the sentries, flood the entire place with men-at-arms.

4

No river so wild,
 bursting its banks to overpower anything in its way,
 to sweep whole flocks across the open plain.

2

I saw him myself, Pyrrhus crazed with carnage, 620
 just at the threshold.

B: Priam

Perhaps you wonder how Priam met his end.

When he saw his city stormed and seized, his gates 630
 wrenched apart, the enemy camped in his palace depths,

the old man dons his armor long unused, he clamps it
 round his shoulders shaking with age and, all for nothing,
 straps his useless sword to his hip, then makes
 for the thick of battle, out to meet his death.

3

At the heart of the house an ample altar stood,
 naked under the skies,
 an ancient laurel bending over the shrine,
 embracing our household gods within its shade.

2

Here, flocking the altar, Queen Hecuba and her daughters
 huddled, clutching, all for nothing, the figures of their gods.
 Old Priam entered, decked in the arms he'd worn as a young man.

640

1: Hecuba

'Are you insane? Poor husband, what impels you
 to strap that sword on now? Where are you rushing?
 Too late for such defense, such help. Not even
 my own Hector, if *he* came to the rescue now . . .
 Come to me, Priam. This altar will shield us all
 or else you'll die with us.'

4

With those words,
 drawing him toward her there, she made a place
 for the old man beside the holy shrine.

650

A

Suddenly, look, a son of Priam, Polites, just escaped
 from slaughter at Pyrrhus' hands, comes racing in
 through spears, through enemy fighters, fleeing down
 the long arcades and deserted hallways – badly wounded,
 Pyrrhus hot on his heels, a weapon poised for the kill,
 about to seize him, about to run him through and pressing
 home as Polites reaches his parents and collapses,
 vomiting out his lifeblood before their eyes.

D

At that, Priam, trapped in the grip of death,
 not holding back, not checking his words, his rage:

660

B: Priam

'You! You and your vicious crimes!
 If any power on high recoils at such an outrage,
 let the gods repay you for all your reckless work,
 grant you the thanks, the rich reward you've earned.
 You've made me see my son's death with my own eyes,
 defiled a father's sight with a son's lifeblood.
 You say you're Achilles' son? You lie! Achilles
 never treated his enemy Priam so. No, he honored
 a suppliant's rights, he blushed to betray my trust,
 he restored my Hector's bloodless corpse for burial,
 sent me safely home to the land I rule!

670

D

With that

and with all his might the old man flings his spear -

C: Pyrrhus

but too impotent now to pierce, it merely grazes

Pyrrhus' brazen shield

and clings there, dangling limp, all for nothing.

'Well then, down you go, a messenger to my father, Achilles!

Tell him about my vicious work, how Pyrrhus

degrades his father's name - don't you forget.

680

Now - die!

3

That said, he drags the old man

straight to the altar, quaking, sliding on his son's blood,

and twisting Priam's hair in his left hand,

his right hand sweeping forth his sword - a flash of steel -

he buries it hilt-deep in the king's flank.

1: Hecuba

Such was the fate of Priam, his death, his lot on earth,

with Troy blazing before his eyes, her ramparts down,

the monarch who once had ruled in all his glory

the many lands of Asia, Asia's many tribes.

A powerful trunk is lying on the shore.

690

The head wrenched from the shoulders.

A corpse without a name.

Aeneas

Then, for the first time

the full horror came home to me at last. I froze.

The thought of my own dear father filled my mind when I saw the

old king gasping out his life

with that raw wound – both men were the same age –

and the thought of my wife Creusa, alone, abandoned,

our house plundered, our little son's fate.

I look back – what forces still stood by me?

4

None. Totally spent in war, they'd all deserted,

700

down from the roofs they'd flung themselves to earth

or hurled their broken bodies in the flames.

Aeneas

So, at just that moment I was the one man left

and then I saw her, hiding in silence, tucked away –

Helen of Argos.

Glare of the fires lit my view as I looked down,

scanning the city left and right, and there she was . . .

2: Helen

terrified of the Trojans' hate, now Troy was overpowered,

terrified of the Greeks' revenge, her deserted husband's rage -
 that universal Fury, a curse to Troy and her native land-

710

Aeneas

and there she lurked, skulking, a thing of loathing: Helen.
 Out it flared, the fire inside my soul, my rage ablaze to avenge
 our fallen country - pay Helen back, crime for crime.

'So, this woman, she'll look once more on Sparta, her native Greece?

She'll ride like a queen in triumph with her trophies?

Feast her eyes on her husband, parents, children too?

Her retinue fawning round her, ladies, slaves?

That - with Priam put to the sword? And Troy up in flames?

720

And time and again we Greeks have shed our blood?

Not for all the world.

3: Venus

No fame, no memory to be won

for punishing a woman: such victory reaps no praise.

Aeneas

But to stamp this abomination out as she deserves,

to punish her now, they'll sing my praise for *that*.

What joy, to glut my heart with the fires of vengeance,

bring some peace to the ashes of my people!"

Whirling words - I was swept away by fury now

when all of a sudden there my loving mother stood

before my eyes, but I had never seen her so clearly—Venus, 730
 her pure radiance shining down upon me through the night,
 the goddess in all her glory, just as the gods behold
 her build, her awesome beauty. Grasping my hand
 she held me back, adding this from her rose-red lips:

3: Venus

'My son, what grief could incite such blazing anger?
 Why such fury? And the love you bore me once,
 where has it all gone? Why don't you look first
 where you left your father, Anchises, spent with age?
 Do your wife, Creusa, and your son Iulus still survive?

The Greek battalions are swarming round them all, 740
 and if my love had never rushed to the rescue,
 flames would have swept them off by now or
 enemy sword-blades would have drained their blood.

Think: it's not that beauty, Helen, you should hate,
 not even Paris, the man that you should blame, no,
 it's the gods, the ruthless gods who are tearing down
 the wealth of Troy, her toppling crown of towers.

Look around. I'll sweep it all away, the mist
 so murky, dark, and swirling around you now,
 it clouds your vision, dulls your mortal sight. 750

You are my son. Never fear my orders.

Never refuse to bow to my commands.

There, yes, where you see the massive ramparts shattered,
 blocks wrenched from blocks, the billowing smoke and ash -
 it's Neptune himself, prising loose with his giant trident
 the foundation-stones of Troy, he's making the walls quake,
 ripping up the entire city by her roots.

There's Juno, cruelest in fury, first to commandeer the city's gates,
 sword at her hip and mustering comrades, shock troops
 streaming out of the ships.

Already up on the heights -

760

turn around and look - there's Athena holding the fortress,
 flaming out of the clouds.

Even Father himself, he's filling the Greek hearts
 with courage, stamina - Jove in person spurring the gods
 to fight the Trojan armies!

Run for your life, my son.

Put an end to your labors. I will never leave you,
 I will set you safe at your father's door.'

Aeneas

Parting words. She vanished into the dense night.

A

From Priam's house

he makes his way through fires and massing foes.

The spears recede, the flames roll back before him.

Aeneas

At last, gaining the door of father's ancient house,
 my first concern was to find the man, my first wish
 to spirit him off, into the high mountain range,
 but father, seeing Troy razed from the earth,
 refused to drag his life out now and suffer exile.

D: Anchises

'You in your prime, untouched by age, 790

your blood still coursing strong, you hearts of oak,
 you are the ones to hurry your escape. Myself,
 if the gods on high had wished me to live on,
 they would have saved my palace for me here.

Enough - more than enough - that I have seen
 one sack of my city, once survived its capture.

Here I lie, here laid out for death. Come say
 your parting salutes and leave my body so.

I will find my own death, sword in hand:

my enemies keen for spoils will be so kind. 800

Death without burial? A small price to pay.

For years now, I've lingered out my life,
 despised by the gods, a dead weight to men.

C

So he said, planted there. Nothing could shake him now.

Aeneas

But we dissolved in tears, my wife, Creusa, my son, Iulus,

the whole household, begging my father not to pull
 our lives down with him, adding his own weight
 to the fate that dragged us down.

810

C

He still refuses, holds to his resolve,
 clings to the spot.

Aeneas

And again I rush to arms,
 desperate to die myself. Where could I turn?

4: Creusa

What were our chances now, at this point?

Aeneas

'What! Did you, my own father,
 dream that I could run away and desert you here?
 How could such an outrage slip from a father's lips?

4: Creusa

If it please the gods that nothing of our great city
 shall survive—if you are bent on adding your own death
 to the deaths of Troy and of all your loved ones too,
 the doors of the deaths you crave are spread wide open.

820

Pyrrhus will soon be here, bathed in Priam's blood -

Aeneas

Pyrrhus who butchers sons in their fathers' faces,

slaughters fathers at the altar. Was it for this,
 my loving mother, you swept me clear of the weapons,
 free of the flames? Just to see the enemy camped
 in the very heart of our house, to see my son, Iulus,
 see my father, my wife, Creusa, with them, sacrificed,
 massacred in each other's blood?

B

'Arms, my comrades, bring me arms!' says Aeneas. 830
 'Send me back to the Greeks, let me go back
 to fight new battles. Not all of us here
 will die today without revenge.'

A

Now buckling on
 his sword again and working his left arm through
 the shieldstrap, grasping it tightly, just as he
 was rushing out, right at the doors his wife, Creusa,
 look, flung herself at his feet
 and raised little Iulus up to his father.

4: Creusa

If you are going off to die,
 then take us with you too, 840 to
 face the worst together. But if your battles
 teach you to hope in arms, the arms you buckle on,
 your first duty should be to guard our house.

Desert us, leave us now - to whom? Whom?

Little Iulus, your father and your wife,

so I once was called.'

2

So Creusa cries,

her wails of anguish echoing through the house -

3: Venus

when out of the blue an omen strikes - a marvel!

4: Creusa

Now as we held our son between our hands

and both our grieving faces,

B

a tongue of fire,

850

watch, flares up from the crown of Iulus' head,

1

a subtle flame licking his downy hair,

feeding around the boy's brow,

Aeneas

and though it never harmed him,

panicked, we rush to shake the flame from his curls

and smother the holy fire,

4: Creusa

damp it down with water.

C

But Father Anchises lifts his eyes to the stars in joy
and stretching his hands toward the sky, sings out:

D: Anchises

'Almighty Jove! If any prayer can persuade you now,
look down on us - that's all I ask - if our devotion
has earned it, grant us another omen, Father,
seal this first clear sign.'

860

1

No sooner said
than an instant peal of thunder crashes on the left
and down from the sky a shooting star comes gliding,
trailing a flaming torch to irradiate the night
as it comes sweeping down. We watch it sailing
over the topmost palace roofs to bury itself,
still burning bright, in the forests of Mount Ida,
blazing its path with light, leaving a broad furrow,
a fiery wake, and miles around the smoking sulfur fumes.

Aeneas

Won over at last, my father rises to his full height
and prays to the gods and reveres that holy star:

D: Anchises

'No more delay, not now! You gods of my fathers,

now I follow wherever you lead me, I am with you.

Safeguard our house, safeguard my grandson lulus!

This sign is yours: Troy rests in your power.

I give way, my son. No more refusals.

I will go with you, your comrade.'

C

So he yielded -

A

but now the roar of flames grows louder all through Troy

and the seething floods of fire are rolling closer.

Aeneas

'So come, dear father, climb up onto my shoulders!

I will carry you on my back. This labor of love

will never wear me down. Whatever falls to us now,

we both will share one peril, one path to safety.

Little lulus, walk beside me, and you, my wife,

follow me at a distance, in my footsteps.

Servants, listen closely . . .

2: Servant

Just past the city walls a grave-mound lies

where an old shrine of forsaken Ceres stands

with an ancient cypress growing close beside it—

our fathers' reverence kept it green for years.

Coming by many routes, it's there we meet, says Aeneas.

Aeneas

That will be our rendezvous.

2: Servant

With that,

over his broad shoulders and round his neck he spread

a tawny lion's skin for a cloak, and bowing down,

Aeneas lifts his burden up. Little lulus, clutching

his right hand, keeps pace with tripping steps. 900

His wife trails on behind. And so they make their way

along the pitch-dark paths,

C

and he who had never flinched

at the hurtling spears or swarming Greek assaults—

now every stir of wind, every whisper of sound

alarms him, anxious both for the child beside him

and the burden on his back.

Aeneas

And then, nearing the gates,

thinking we've all got safely through, I suddenly

seem to catch the steady tramp of marching feet

and father, peering out through the darkness, cries:

D: Anchises

'Run for it now, my boy, you must. They're closing in,

910

I can see their glinting shields, their flashing bronze!

3

Then in his panic something strange, some enemy power
robbed Aeneas of his senses.

C

Lost, he was leaving behind
familiar paths, at a run down blind dead ends, when -

Aeneas

Oh dear god, my wife, Creusa -

What then, did she stop in her tracks or lose her way?

1

Or exhausted, sink down to rest?

3

Who knows?

Aeneas

I never set my eyes on her again.

I never looked back, she never crossed my mind -

920

Creusa, lost - not till we reached that old shrine

where, with all our people rallied at last,

she alone was missing.

2

Lost

to her friends, her son, her husband - gone forever.

Aeneas

Raving, I blamed them all, the gods, the human race -
 what crueler blow did I feel that night?

Back I go to Troy . . .

930

my mind steeled to relive the whole disaster,
 retrace my route through the whole city now
 and put my life in danger one more time.

A

First then,

back to the looming walls, the shadowy rear gates
 by which he'd left the city, back he goes in his tracks,
 retracing, straining to find his footsteps in the dark,
 with terror at every turn, the very silence makes him cringe.

Aeneas

Then back to my house I go - if only, only she's gone there -

B

but the Greeks have flooded in, seized the entire place.

D

All over now.

B

Devouring fire whipped by the winds
 goes churning into the rooftops, flames surging
 over them, scorching blasts raging up the sky.

940

Aeneas

On I go and again I see the palace of Priam

set on the heights,

C

but there in colonnades

deserted now -

3: Venus

in the sanctuary of Juno -

C

there stand the elite watchmen of the Greeks,

guarding all their loot.

B

All the treasures of Troy

hauled from the burning shrines - the sacramental tables,

bowls of solid gold and the holy robes they'd seized

from every quarter - Greeks, piling high the plunder.

950

2

Children and trembling mothers rounded up

in a long, endless line.

Aeneas

Why, I even dared fling

my voice through the dark, my shouts filled the streets

as time and again, overcome with grief I called out

'Creusa!'

1

Nothing, no reply, and again:

Aeneas

'Creusa!

C

But then as he madly rushed from house to house,
no end in sight, abruptly, right before his eyes
he saw her stricken ghost, his own Creusa's shade.

Aeneas

But larger than life, the life I'd known so well.

I froze. My hackles bristled, voice choked in my throat,
and my wife spoke out to ease me of my anguish:

960

4: Creusa

'My dear husband, why so eager to give yourself
to such mad flights of grief? It's not without
the will of the gods these things have come to pass.

But the gods forbid you to take Creusa with you,
bound from Troy together. The king of lofty Olympus
won't allow it. A long exile is your fate . . .

the vast plains of the sea are yours to plow
until you reach the land where the Tiber

flows with its smooth march through rich and loamy fields,
a land of hardy people. There great joy and a kingdom
are yours to claim, and a queen to make your wife.

970

Dispel your tears for Creusa whom you loved.

I will never behold the high and mighty pride
of Greek palaces, or go as a slave to some Greek matron, no, not I,
daughter of Troy that I am, the wife of Venus' son.
The Great Mother of Gods detains me on these shores.
And now farewell. Hold dear the son we share,
we love together.'

Aeneas

These were her parting words , 980
and for all my tears - I longed to say so much -
dissolving into the empty air, she left me now.

D

Three times he tried to fling his arms around her neck -

Aeneas

three times I embraced - nothing . . . her phantom
sifting through my fingers,
light as wind, quick as a dream in flight.

C

Gone

and at last the night was over.

Aeneas

Back I went to my people

and I was amazed to see what throngs of new companions
had poured in to swell our numbers -

mothers,

C

men,

B

our forces gathered for exile,

3

grieving masses.

990

Aeneas

They had come together from every quarter,

spirits ready for me to lead them

over the sea to whatever lands I'd choose.

And now the morning star was mounting above

the high crests of Mount Ida, leading on the day.

A

The Greeks had taken the city, blocked off every gate.

No hope of rescue now.

Aeneas

So I gave way at last and lifted my father.

3

Proud Troy had fallen.

1

Exiles now, searching earth for a home.

2

We launch out in tears and desert our native land,

C

the old safe haven,

D

the plains where Troy once stood.