**Virgil, *Aeneid*** 2.705-720

**\*What happens in the intervening section (lines 558-704)?**

Aeneas (after the death of Priam), is suddenly concerned about the fate of his father, Anchises, his wife, Creusa, and his son, Ascanius, all of whom were still at home, and begins to make his way to them through Troy's streets when he unexpectedly encounters Helen. Convinced that her elopement with Paris was the cause of the war and Troy's downfall, he is seized by a vengeful desire to kill her and would have done so if his mother, Venus, had not appeared and stayed his hand. Venus tells him that neither Helen nor Paris is to blame for Troy's destruction; it was willed by the gods, whom she caused to appear to Aeneas in a series of visions that showed them all in a destructive mood.

***Venus speaks to her son, tearing away a mist from his eyes and showing the gods actually hacking away at the city:***

“It is the gods, the relentless gods, who overturn this wealth and make Troy topple from her pinnacle. Behold—for all the cloud, which now, drawn over your sight, dulls your mortal vision, I will tear away;—here, where you see shattered piles and rocks torn from rocks, and smoke eddying up mixed with dust, Neptune shakes the walls and foundations that his mighty trident has upheaved, and uproots all the city from her base. Here Juno, fiercest of all, is foremost to hold the Scaean gates and, girt with steel, furiously calls from the ships her allied band . . . My father himself (Jupiter) gives the Greeks courage and auspicious strength; he himself stirs up the gods against the Trojan arms. Hasten your flight, my son, and put an end to your toil…”

***Aeneas:***

“Then, indeed, it seemed to me that all Ilium was sinking into the flames and that Neptune’s Troy was being overturned from her base—even as when on mountain-tops woodmen emulously strain to overturn an ancient ash tree, which has been hacked with many a blow of axe and iron; it ever threatens to fall, and nods with trembling leafage and rocking crest, till, little by little, overcome with wounds, it gives one loud last groan and, uptorn from the ridges, comes crashing down. I descend and, guided by a god, make my way amid fire and foes. Weapons give me passage and the flames retire.”

Aeneas, deciding to flee from Troy with his family, returns home at last, but Anchises, who declares that he would rather die than face exile at his age, refuses to abandon his home and urges the others to leave without him. At that moment, Aeneas and his family witnessed a portent: a flame appeares around Ascanius's head, and when Anchises prays to Jupiter for another sign, thunder rumbles — an affirmative omen — and a star streaks across the sky in the direction of Mount Ida. Now convinced that his departure was divinely ordained, Anchises changed his mind; with Aeneas holding his son by the hand and carrying his father on his back, and Creusa following behind, they left the house.

***Anchises speaks:***

“Scarcely had the aged man thus spoken, when with sudden crash there was thunder on the left and a star shot from heaven, gliding through the darkness, and drawing a fiery trail amid a flood of light. We watch it glide over the palace roof and bury in Ida’s forest the splendour that marked its path; then the long-drawn furrow shines, and far and wide all about reeks with sulphur. At this, indeed, my father was overcome and, rising to his feet, salutes the gods, and worships the holy star. ‘Now, now there is no delay; I follow, and where you lead, there am I. Gods of my fathers! save my house, save my grandson. Yours is this omen, and under your protection stands Troy. Yes, I yield, and refuse not, my son, to go in your company.’



Lines 705-798: this narrative development, thanks to Creusa’s disappearance and subsequent message, entails profound changes in Aeneas’ status and goals. Numerous verbal parallels will emerge between the disappearances of Eurydice (which Virgil portrayed in an earlier work, *Georgics* 4) and of Creusa here. It was above all Jacques Heurgon’s discovery (1931, 264) of how V. took the scene in G.4 and here inverted the crucial detail, of Aeneas who fails to turn round and thus does not notice that his wife has disappeared, that transformed our understanding of the relationship of the two narratives. We do not, however, know on what narrative V. principally drew. (HORFALL p .498f.)

dixerat ille, et iam per moenia[[1]](#footnote-1) clarior[[2]](#footnote-2) ignis 705

auditur, propiusque aestus incendia volvunt.[[3]](#footnote-3)

So Anchises spoke and now through the city more loudly the blaze is heard, and the flames roll their fiery flood closer and closer.

'ergo age, care pater,[[4]](#footnote-4) cervici imponere nostrae;

ipse subibo umeris nec me labor iste gravabit;

‘Come then, dear father, place yourself upon my neck; I will support you on my own shoulders, and this task will not weigh me down.

quo res cumque cadent, unum et commune periclum,

una[[5]](#footnote-5) salus ambobus erit. mihi parvus[[6]](#footnote-6) Iulus 710

sit comes, et longe[[7]](#footnote-7) servet vestigia coniunx.

However things may fall, we two will have one common peril, one (common) salvation. Let little Iulus come with me, and let my wife follow our steps at a distance.

vos, famuli, quae dicam animis advertite vestris.

est urbe egressis tumulus templumque vetustum

desertae[[8]](#footnote-8) Cereris, iuxtaque antiqua cupressus

religione patrum multos servata per annos; 715

You servants, heed what I say. As you leave the city, there is a mound and ancient temple of **forlorn Ceres**, with an old cypress[[9]](#footnote-9) near by, saved for many years by the reverence of our fathers.

hanc ex diverso sedem veniemus in unam.

tu, genitor, cape sacra manu patriosque penatis;

To this one spot we will come from different directions. Father, take in your arms the sacred emblems of our country’s household gods;

me bello e tanto digressum et caede recenti

attrectare nefas, donec me flumine vivo abluero.’ 720

for me, fresh from fierce battle[[10]](#footnote-10) and recent slaughter, it would be sinful to handle them until I have washed myself clean in fresh running[[11]](#footnote-11) water.’

1. Literally ‘city walls’, but Anch.’s out-of-the-way house (299f.) is not specified as being specially near the city walls and here the natural sense does seem to be ‘the city buildings’ (which would tend to intensify

roar and echo). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Notice this can also mean ‘more brightly’, but not with **auditur**. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Very striking phrase. It suggests a flood of heat from the conflagration. AESTUS means ‘heat’ but it often indicates ‘tide’ or ‘rough sea’. So we have the idea of heat rolling/ being rolled along like seawaves or the tide. Unstoppable. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Notice how Aeneas is tender & affectionate towards his father. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Anaphora of UNUS/UNA stresses the shared nature. The antithesis of **unus** and **ambo**, one danger for both of us/ the two of us. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. A ‘pathetic’, emotional detail. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. NOT misogynistic! It makes it easier to account for Creusa’s disappearance later and it could also be to protect here. It was pointed out 1600 years ago by Tiberius Claudius Donatus (c.AD 430s), a Roman grammarian, in his commentary to Virgil, *that if they were all together, they might all die*. Notice that later, aeneas in addressing his servants says: To this one spot we will come from different directions.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. There seems to be nothing at all behind this tiny detail, but that is of no importance; in itself it represents credible specificity. Either (1) deserted by the death of her priest Polyboetes, supra, or (2), deserted on account of ten years of siege, or (3) deserted by her daughter Proserpina (who was carried of by Pluto to the Underworld). (2) might be the least fanciful of those suggestions. Or is it *hypallage*, the temple is deserted. Many temples were ruined during the period of Rome’s civil war (ending in 31 BC, 2 years before the poet began writing his epic) so Virgil’s audience would have understood this. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The cypress tree has connections with death. The title of Agatha Christie’s detetive Poirot novel *Sad Cypress* comes from a song in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* : “Come away, come away, death, And in sad cypress let me be laid…” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Possibly one of those passages where **bellum** is best taken as referring to ‘battle’, rather than ‘war’. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For purposes of purification, fresh, running water is mandatory. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)