FUNERAL GAMES AT SICILY

New Winds, New Darkness

Aeneas meanwhile held course through the water. The fleet steadily cut through seas darkened by Northwind. He gazed back at Carthage, glowing with Dido’s tragic burning. Whatever began or extended that large fire was unknown. But all the grief of dishonored love was known, and woman’s power when outraged. Trojan hearts were moved by a somber foreboding. Now the ships were at sea, land was no longer in sight, everywhere sky, everywhere water:

10 a blue-black stormcloud rose and confronted Aeneas, fraught with winter and night. Water shivered in darkness. High on the stern even Palinurus the helmsman called, “My God, what clouds are circling in heaven? Our Father Neptune, what are you up to?” He promptly ordered tackle secured, oars pulled on robustly, canvas turned to the wind. He said to Aeneas, “Your spirit is strong, but even if Jupiter pledged it I’d never hope to reach Italy’s coast in this weather. Winds keep shifting abeam and muttering, rising out of the west. The air is a dark, thickening stormcloud. We lack strength to fight such power and maintain headway. Where Luck is good or strong we should follow: change course where she calls us. Not far is the loyal, brotherly coast of Eryx, I think—a Sicilian harbor—if only the stars are clear in my mind that I sailed by.”
Return to Sicily

Aeneas wisely answered, "True, the winds are insistent. I've watched you fight them hard for a long time without progress. Alter your course and canvas. What land is more welcome, where could I beach tired ships with more pleasure than there on that coast? It harbors our Trojan Acestes and holds in its lap the bones of my Father Anchises." He stopped, they headed for port, a following Westwind tensed sail and hurried the fleet through the water. They gladly returned at length to a beach they remembered. Watching amazed from the high ridge of a mountain, Acestes descended to meet old friends when the ships were arriving. Bristling with arrows, wearing a Libyan bearskin, born of a mother at Troy to the God of the River Crinuses, he still recalled the old generation, welcoming Trojans back with laughter and country comfort. The worn-out men were cheered by his welcome.

In Memory of Anchises

When Dawn and the next day's brightness had routed the stars, Aeneas called his friends from the lengthy shore to a meeting. He stood on high ground to address them. "You fine sons of Dardanus, Gods' bloodline from heaven! The months have passed, an annual cycle is finished since Trojans buried remains, the bones of my godlike Father, in ground nearby and blessed the altar in mourning. The day is here, if I'm not wrong, which will always be bitter, always held in respect, since the Sky-Gods desired it. If I were an exile today on Gaetulan Sandbanks or caught by Greeks at sea and kept at Mycenae, I'd still complete the annual prayer and solemn rite: I'd pile the correct gifts on an altar. Instead we're here, by the ashes and bones of my Father himself—hardly I think without some consenting God's will—borne right to the port of our kinsmen.

Aeneas Announces the Games

"Come, then. Everyone join in a happy observance. Pray to the Winds, let them grant that Anchises be honored with annual rites in holy shrines when my city is founded. Acestes, born at Troy, is contributing oxen,
two head for every ship. Bring to the banquet
both our native House-Gods and those revered by Acestes,
our host. Then, when Dawn gives us her caring
light, when her glow reveals the world for the ninth time,
I'll hold games. First for four of our Trojan
ships. Then for the best sprinters. For those who are daring
and strong with spears. For the best at a challenge with arrows.
For boxers—those who trust to leather and gauntlets.

Everyone come, examine the prizes and palms for each winner.
But first a silence. Everyone tie leaves to your temples.”

*The Snake at the Tomb*

He stopped and circled his forehead with myrtle of Venus.
Helymus followed, together with aging Acestes
and young Ascanius. All the young men did likewise.
Aeneas moved from the meeting. Hundreds of people
walked to the death-mound, large numbers jostling around him.
He duly poured on the ground libations of unmixed
wine, two cups, with two of fresh milk and of sacred
blood. He scattered purple flowers. “I greet you,”

he said, “I greet you again, revered ashes, the Father
I saved in vain. Dark soul of Anchises,
I wasn’t allowed to search for Italian country
with you, for the Fate-picked Ausonian field or the Tiber,
wherever—" he stopped: an oily snake at the death-mound’s
base had coiled into seven large rounds to embrace it
gently. The seven rings trailed by an altar,
its back a mottled dark blue and its scaly
skin a burning gold, the snake like a rainbow
throwing a thousand colors back at the sun through a cloud-burst.

The vision stunned Aeneas. Shortly the serpent’s
long column slithered among bowls and resplendent
cups where it tasted the meal. Soon it abandoned
food on the altar and crept to the tomb’s base. It was harmless.
With more zeal Aeneas renewed the rites for his father
just begun, unsure if the snake were a local
God or Anchises’ familiar. He slaughtered the full-grown
sheep required, two swine, two heifers with night-black
backs. He poured wine from a bowl and called on Anchises’
great soul, on the Dead freed from the Acheron River.

His men, as their means allowed, were also presenting
gifts gladly. They killed bulls and loaded an altar.
Some set cauldrons in place; others were searing
cutlets or feeding coal to spits while spread on the beachgrass.

_The Games Begin_

The longed-for day arrived. Phaethon’s horses carried the glow of the ninth dawn through the peaceful sky. Acestes’ famous name had excited neighbors: a cheerful crowd filled up the shoreline to see these Trojans. Some were prepared to compete there. Awards were placed in view first in the center of action: green garlands, ritual tripods, armor and palm leaf, rewarding the winners; robes imbed in purple, gold and silver in talents. A trumpet called from a hill—the games were beginning.

_A Ship Race_

Four big ships had entered the first competition, closely matched and loaded with oars: the best in the squadron. Mnestheus drove _Leviathan’s_ quick and vigorous oarsmen (soon _Italian_ Mnestheus, naming the Memmian household). Gyas commanded the huge bulk of the massive _Chimaera_—raised like a town, rowed by three stories of Trojans, three full teams ready to drive her together. Sergestus (a name now held by the Sergian household) rode in the great _Centaur_. Cloanthus (who’d father Cluentians of Rome) sailed the indigo _Scylla_. Well out to sea a rockpile confronted the foamy beach. Submerged at times by a pounding of heavy surf when Northwesterly storms blocked out the starlight, the rock re-emerged when the sea lay calm as a level field; sun-loving gulls welcomed the refuge. Lordly Aeneas had placed leaves from an oaktree here as a green marker, helping each captain to know when to heel in the long race, when to circle.

_Tension at the Start_

They cast lots for position. Captains were climbing aft, a glitter of purple and gold trim in the distance. Crewmen wreathed their temples in poplar, smeared oil on their bare, glistening shoulders and sat on benches, arms tensed for the rowing. Waiting, intent on the signal, hearts drained by a pulsing fear or leaping with hope, they were peaked for this honor. _There_—the trumpet loudly blared and abruptly
140 every ship jumped from its place while an uproar
from crewmen struck at the sky. Arms pulled and the water
frothed where furrows were plowed, rowers together
splashing and three-pronged bows utterly crushing
the waves. Paired chariot horse-teams will break from
their stalls and reach a field in a race-course less quickly,
charioteers waving and flurrying reins of a bolting
team while leaning forward and whipping the horses.
Cheers and shouts of sailors with cries of supporters
rang through the whole forest, the shoreline re-echoed
their shouts, and hills struck by the clamor re-sounded.

Turning Point

Gyas flew out to sea first, slipping by others
in all the noise and confusion. Cloanthus pursued him
closely, his rowers were better, but all of that pinewood
slowed him down. An equal distance behind them
Leviathan struggled with Centaur for better position:
now Leviathan held it, then the ponderous Centaur
passed and led. Soon both were together,
prow and beam side by side as they cut through the water.
In time they neared the rockpile. Reaching the marker,
the leading captain, Gyas, seawater swirling
around him, called to the ship’s helmsman, Menoetes:
“Why so far to starboard? Alter your course there,
hug that rock. Our port-side oar-blades can scratch it!
Others can have deep water.” Menoetes however
feared some blind reef and swung the bow to the open
sea. “Where are you off to?” Gyas was yelling
now: “Close to that rock, Menoetes!” And picture
Cloanthus, close astern, taking the inside
track: he scraped past the vessel of Gyas!

170 With noisy surf and rock to port, suddenly passing
the leader, he cleared the mark and headed for risk-free
waves. What intense bitterness burned in the marrow
of Gyas! Tears on his cheeks, he grabbed a fretful Menoetes,
forgot good grace and the safety of crewmen,
and threw him headlong down from the high stern in the water.
He manned the tiller himself—the skipper the helmsman,
haranguing crewmen, turning his wheel to the marker.
A heavy Menoetes bobbed up shortly from under,
older now, his clothes drenched by the water.

180 He headed for high ground, some dry rock, and he sat there.
Trojans who'd laughed at the man’s falling and swimming
laughed when he spat up salt sea from his stomach.

_The Men of Mnestheus_

Joy and hope flared in Mnestheus now and Sergestus,
the last two men, to catch the dawdling Gyas.
Sergestus held a lead approaching the rockpile
but not by much—only part of a boat-length—
part of _Leviathan’s_ bow pressed him amidship.
And there amidship Mnestheus paced and encouraged
crewmen himself: “Now, _now_ to your rowing,
you friends of Hector! I picked you all as companions
when Troy fell: it’s time to show me your muscle,
show that spirit you showed on Gaetulian Sandbanks,
Ionian seas, the Malean waves that pursued us.
I cannot hope for first: Mnestheus won’t be the winner—but oh, you Neptune, let them win whom you wish _to!_—
only avoid the shame and loathing of last place:
do that at least, my friends.” Strained to the utmost
they leaned and stroked hard, the bronze afterdeck shuddered,
sea-floor dragged by, breath labored, their bodies
trembled, mouths dried out, everyone sweated in trickles.
Chance itself brought them the honor they longed for.
Sergestus, frantically wedging his bow through the inside
close to the rocks, entered a techerous passage
and sadly ran aground on a rocky projection.
The rockpile shook. Oars, forced onto jagged
ledge, splintered. The bow cracked and was dangling.
Sailors jumped up and called out: they were stuck there.
They pushed with sharp poles pointed with iron.
They gathered broken pieces of oar from the water.

Mnestheus, pleased and stirred at how this had happened,
headed for open water, each column of rowers
racing. He prayed to the Winds while running a downhill
swell, just like a frightened dove that abruptly
breaks from her cavelike home where the dear nestlings are
hidden:
she flits over fields, a loud and terrified flapping
at first by the nest, and in time she glides on a current
of quiet air: her wings go fast without beating.
Mnestheus flew that way on _Leviathan,_ cutting
through final waves. Momentum carried him forward.

First he left Sergestus behind as he struggled
high on that rock, vainly calling for help in the shallow water, trying to race with oars that were shattered. Next he approached Gyas himself in the massive bulk of Chimaera: she yielded, deprived of her helmsman. Only Cloanthus remained now at the finish. Mnestheus chased him, pushing his crew to the limit, noise actually doubled, everyone cheered the pursuer fiercely, the whole sky split from the uproar. One crew, resenting the loss of a prize they considered their own, were willing to trade their lives for the honor; the other, fed by success, felt strong so they were strong.

The Prayer of Cloanthus

The latter threatened to win—the bows were abreast now. Hands held high over the water, Cloanthus poured out prayer, he called on Gods and he promised: “You Powers who rule the sea, this water we race on, I’ll gladly stand a white bull on that beachsand before your altars, I’m bound to that promise: I’ll offer its flesh to the surf and pour wine on your water.”

He stopped speaking: a whole chorus of Nereids heard him deep undersea, with Phorcus and chaste Panopea: the huge hand itself of Portunus, that Father, moved the ship, and it flew to the land like a feathered arrow or whizzing Southwind. It stopped in the depths of the harbor.

Ganymede’s Flight

The son of Anchises, when all were properly summoned, called Cloanthus the winner. Heralds proclaimed him loudly and green laurel circled his temples. The ships’ crews were allowed to choose among prizes: three young bulls, wine and a large talent of silver. Aeneas offered special awards to the captains. A chlamys of gold-stitched cloth for the winner: a winding double border of Meliboean purple around it, a young prince in the cloth’s design, and forested Ida: Ganymede, chasing spirited deer, tired them and speared them, looking winded and wild—the one whom Jupiter’s eagle, stooping from Ida, carried high in its talons while hands of old guardians reached for the sky-heights in vain and savage dogs barked at the heavens. The man who came in second now, and a strong one,
received a triply mailed golden lorica

260 with polished clasps. Aeneas himself had removed it near Troy's heights from Demoleos, close to the fast-flowing Simois—

Mnestheus' gift, a prize and protection in battle. The servants Phegeus and Sagaris hardly could lift it, they struggled to move the layered piece; but Demoleos once had worn it while running and scattering Trojans. A pair of bronze cauldrons were given to third place, and bowls in rough relief, finished in silver.

A Lost Ship Saved

With each man proud of some valuable honor now, walking with purple fillets crowning his forehead,

270 Sergestus pushed a prizeless boat from the ragged ledge. People laughed at all the prying and tearing, the lost oars and disabled tier on the port side. The way a snake, caught at times on a roadway mound and crossed by a brass wheel at an angle, or struck hard by a traveler's rock, left there and dying, will twist its long form: escape may be futile but fiercely the burning eyes look up and a hissing tongue darts out—though elsewhere seriously wounded and slowed, the coils of that body double and struggle:

280 rowers moved the boat of Sergestus that slowly. Still he set more sail, it filled, and he entered the harbor. Aeneas gave Sergestus the award he had promised, glad that his friends were safe and the ship had been salvaged. He gave him a female slave who knew the work of Minerva: Phoële, her family in Crete, twin boys at her nipples.

Sprinters

The ship-race over, Aeneas dutifully headed for grassy field circled completely by wooded and winding hills that formed a natural stadium there in the valley. Thousands of people surrounded

290 and walked with their leader. He sat on a dais, encouraging those who just might want competition in sprinting now by offering prizes to stimulate spirit. They came from everywhere—Trojans mixed with Sicilians. Nisus was first, with Euryalus:

Euryalus boyish and green, exceptionally handsome, Nisus loving the boy devotedly. Next was Diores,
of royal roots, the notable household of Priam. 
Then came Salius and Patron: the one Arcananian, 
the other from Arcady, a Tegean family bloodline.

300 Helymus came with Panopes, two Trinacrian youngsters—
skilled woodsmen and friends of aging Acestes. 
Many others approached, their fame obscure or forgotten. 
Aeneas addressed them now as he stood in the center. 
"Take my word—give me your cheerful attention—
none of your number will leave my sight unrewarded! 
I'll give you Gnosian arrows of brilliantly polished 
steel, two-edged axes with silver engraving—
the same reward for all. Those who are winners 
will take more, and fasten olive green to their temples.

310 The first will receive a horse with exceptional trappings. 
The second, an Amazon quiver loaded with Thracian 
arrows, the wide golden baldric that circles 
around and the buckle with polished jewels that ties it. 
The third, a Greek helmet—you'll go with it gladly."

Nisus Leads At First

After his talk they took their positions. On hearing 
a signal they broke out fast from their marks and maneuvered 
for space, flying like stormclouds, keeping their eyes on the finish. 
The first to break from the others and lengthen the lead-time 
was Nisus—faster then winged lightning or windstorm.

320 Salius followed next, but next by a goodly 
distance. Holding third, after an open 
gap, was Euryalus. 
Helymus followed Euryalus, trailed by Diores—
look at him pressing, nicking that foot with his own foot, 
right on the shoulder! If only the race had been longer 
he might have caught them and won, or made it uncertain.

The Blood Puddle

Soon they were almost done, tiring and nearing 
a last finishing stretch—when a woebegone Nisus 
slid upon a puddle of blood! Bulls had been slaughtered 
330 here by chance, ground and grass soaked by the out-flow. 
Nisus already had cheered for his win when he staggered, 
lost his footing and went to the ground in a headlong 
dive into slime, soil and ritual bloodstain. 
Yet he remembered the one he cared for, Euryalus: 
lifting himself though slipping, he moved into Salius'
path, who also tumbled and sprawled in the sand-clots. Euryalus leaped on past with help from his comrade, the first-place winner, applauded and cheered when he flew by. Helymus followed. The third-place palm was Diores’.

*Fairness and Foul*

340 Salius filled the whole arena with protest, loudly shouting right in the faces of elders, claiming the stolen prize for himself: he’d been fouled out. People favored Euryalus, though—his tears were becoming, his worth appealing, combined with physical beauty. Diores also strongly supported Euryalus: if first prize went to Salius, Diores would lose—the palm and prize he’d won would be nothing. Aeneas spoke like a father. “Boys, you will surely retain your winnings. No one will change the palms or arrangement.

350 But let me pity the fall of an innocent comrade.” After speaking he gave Salius the hide of a massive Gaetulan lion with claws of gold and mane overflowing. Now Nisus protested! “If pity and prizes go to a stumbling loser, where are the presents earned by Nisus? I rate the praise of a first-place crown—if Luck were a friend of Salius and Nisus.” While speaking he pointed to still-wet grime on his body and smeared face. Aeneas, an excellent father, smiled and ordered a shield brought out—Didymaon’s achievement, once pulled by Greeks from a sacred portal of Neptune. He gave an exceptional man an exceptional honor.

*Lethal Fists*

Now that racing had ended and palms were awarded Aeneas announced, “I speak to anyone present with strength of heart and spirit: come forward and hold out fists for straps of leather.” He showed awards for the boxing: a steer flecked with fillets and gold for the winner; a sword and prize helmet to comfort the loser. Without delay Dares offered his bulging strength, he stood there as men openly murmured:

370 Dares alone had once contended with Paris; he’d beaten Butes too by a mound where the once-great Hector lay. Butes had brought his enormous
girth from Bebrycia, home of Amycus’ people,
but Dares had knocked him flat and he’d died in the tawny
dust. Holding his head up high for a fistfight,
Dares displayed broad shoulders, sparring with two hands,
both arms lashing the air, jabbing and hooking.

_The Gauntlets of Eryx_

Who would challenge? No one in all the assembly
dared to approach the man or slide hands into gauntlets.

380 Quickly assuming therefore that all had conceded
the winner’s palm, Dares stood at the feet of Aeneas,
holding the bullock’s horn with his left hand and asking,
“Son of the Goddess, if no one dares or believes he can fight me,
why should I stand here? How long is it right to delay things?
Order my prize led off.” All of the Trojans
voiced agreement: the man should take what was promised.
Here Acestes gravely chided Entellus,
sitting on green couches of grass next to each other.
“Entellus, our strongest champion once! Your title was empty?

390 Letting a fine prize be seized with no struggle—
what patience! Where is our God and your teacher,
Eryx? Do we remember all of Trinacria’s glory
and Eryx for nothing? The trophies that hung from your ceiling?”
Entellus: “The love of glory and praise has not left me.
Fear I shrug off. But cold and aging have slowed me,
thinned my blood, wearied and numbed the strength of my body.
If youth were mine still—the youth of that proudly
posturing upstart—if I were young at this moment,
you’d hardly need some fancy bull or reward to induce me:

400 I’d scorn prizes and fight.” But just as he finished
he threw a pair of immensely heavy gloves in the center.
Eryx had used them briskly and often in fistfights,
tough hides stretched on his knuckles and forearms.
They stunned the mind: a dense layer of seven
bull’s-hides, stiffened with lead and stitches of iron.
And stunned most, Dares himself had doubts about fighting.
The high-spirited son of Anchises maneuvered the heavy,
thonged folds of the gloves this way and that way.
Shortly the older man addressed him with feeling.

410 “What if someone could see the gloves and the armor
itself of Hercules now and a grim fight on this coastline?
Eryx wore my weapons once—your brother, Aeneas.
Look: fetid blood-spots and brain-flecks are still here.
He faced Hercules' might; I used them myself once, when better blood gave me strength, and the envy of Age had not yet scattered grey on my temples. Now, if Dares of Troy objects to our weapons and kindly Aeneas agrees, with King Acestes' approval we'll even the match: I'll forgo Eryx's gauntlets—

420 don't be afraid, Dares—and you, the gloves of your Trojans."

Done, he removed a double cape from a shoulder, baring a huge frame, imposing muscle and tendon. He stood on the sand dead center, and stood there immensely. The son of Anchises brought out matched gloves like a father: the same gauntlets were strapped on the hands of both boxers.

Styles of Fighting

Quickly they squared off, each man alertly on tiptoe, fearlessly lifting an arm in the air first to the Sky-Gods. Keeping their heads high and back from the jabbing, they mixed and punched at punches, feinting and flicking:

430 Dares quick on his feet, confident, younger, Entellus weighty and strong, though his knees were unsteady, large joints shaky and slow, and his breathing was labored. The men threw plenty of hard blows that were wasted. A few drubbed a ribcage, causing a massive chest to rumble. Soon occasional punches struck a temple or head. Cheeks smacked from the harder impact. Heavy Entellus remained in position, only dodging a blow by watching and weaving. Dares, like someone bombarding the heights of a city,

440 or laying siege to a mountain fort with his missiles, probed for openings here and there, and continued pressing from every angle sharply, but vainly. Now Entellus rose up high with a right hand and hooked it downward, but Dares had spotted it coming and nimbly avoided the blow by sidestepping quickly. Entellus had thrown strength at the wind—and moreover the man ponderously slipped and fell, his lumbering body flat on the ground like a hollow pinetree that often topples, uprooted on high Erymanthus or Ida.

The Rage of Entellus

450 Trinacrian people and Trojans anxiously jumped up, shouts went to the sky, and Acestes, the first to come running, lifted his old friend from the ground in compassion.
Hardly deterred or upset by the fall, the contender returned to the fight fiercer. Anger stirred up his power: awakened strength and shame ignited his manhood. He hotly drove Dares backward through all the arena, pounding him now with right and left combinations. No pause, no rest—like volleys of hail from a stormcloud banging a rooftop, hard blows from the champion’s both hands repeatedly pummeled Dares and spun him.

**A Deadly Demonstration**

Aeneas paternally stopped the fight. He could hardly allow such fierceness of spirit, the rage of Entellus, to go on longer. Aeneas rescued the worn-out Dares and offered a few words to console him. “My sorry friend, what stark madness captured your spirit! You must see the Powers have changed to help your opponent: yield to the Gods.” That word ended the fighting. Dares, led by some loyal friends to the roadstead, dragged along weak-kneed, shaking a groggy head, spitting clumps of blood mixed with some broken pieces of tooth. Friends were called and accepted his helmet and sword. The palm and bull went to Entellus. The winner, proud of the bull now and elated, spoke out: “Son of the Goddess and all of you Trojans, look at the bodily strength I had as a young man: see what death you called Dares away from.” He stopped and stood there directly facing the bullock. That prize for the fight stood still. Raising a right hand high he aimed between the horns at the midpoint: the gauntlet struck, fractured the skull and spattered the brains out. The bull sprawled on the ground, quivered and died there. Entellus prayed from his heart over the carcass. “Eryx, the bull is yours. I offer a better life than Dares’ death. I’ve won. I’m finished with gauntlets.”

**Bird Target**

Next Aeneas called on those who were thinking perhaps of competing with fast-flying arrows. He set out prizes and lent a large hand in dismasting Serestus’ ship. A fluttering dove at the masthead hung by a cord, the high target for bowmen. Participants gathered and threw their lots in a welcome
brass helmet. Hippocoön, Hyrtacus’ younger, came up first and foremost; people applauded. Mnestheus followed—earlier one of the ship-race winners, the green olive circling his forehead. Your brother Eurytion, famous Pandarus, came up third: when Pallas told you once to damage a peace-pact you twirled a spear first in the midst of Achaean. The last one left at the helmet’s base was Acestes, daring to try his hand in an action of young men.

A Rare Bowman

500 Each man bent a bow for himself in a forceful show of strength. They drew out arrows from quivers. The first to pierce the winged breeze by twanging a bowstring, sending an arrow skyward, was Hyrtacus’ younger: it flew off and stuck in the fronting wood of the masthead. Timber shook and the bird’s terrified feathers flapped. Everyone loudly yelled and applauded. Mnestheus eagerly stood up next. Bending the bow back, he sighted along the shaft and directed it upward. He failed to strike the bird itself with an arrow, sadly, but severed the linen cord which had knotted its leg to the high mast. The bird which had hung there was free and raced for a dark cloud by riding a Southwind. Quickly Eurytion now, whose bow had been ready, the arrow nocked for a while, called on and vowed to his brother. He scanned the sky, empty except for the happy bird beating its wings for that stormcloud. He struck it: the bird dropped, abandoning life in the starry air and falling, returning the arrow embedded.

The Omen of Fire

520 Only Acestes remained—and the palm had been taken. Still he shot an arrow high in the air to exhibit a father’s power and skill. The bowstring was humming when suddenly a sign confronted their vision, predicting future greatness. A major event would confirm it later and frightened prophets would sing of the omen. The arrow burst into flame when it flew through a hazy cloud and inscribed a trail of fire as it dwindled and died in the thin air. A shooting star will be torn from the sky often that way, and trail out hair when it passes. Men of Troy and Trinacria, spirits astonished,
530 stood there praying to Sky-Gods. Their leader, Aeneas, accepted the sign. Embracing a happy Acestes, he loaded the man with rich prizes and told him, “Take them, father. The great King of Olympus—that was no chance sign—wants you to lead off the honors. Accept this present from ageless Anchises, my Father: an image-embossed wine-bowl given by Thracian Cisseus once to my Father himself as an ample gift, a proof of his own love and remembrance.” He stopped and circled Acestes’ forehead with laurel greens. First and foremost he called him the winner. Eurytion graciously bore no grudge at the honor, although he alone had shot the bird from the heavens. Next the man who’d severed the cord came to be honored. Last, the one whose winged arrow had stuck in the masthead.

_The Boys’ Parade_

Before the contest ended, Aeneas paternally called for Epytus’ son, a loyal companion and guide of young Iulus, and spoke to him closely: “Go to Ascanius quickly now, see if the young men’s troops are formed and prepared to maneuver their horses. Tell him to lead the corps in his grandfather’s honor and show off their weapons.” Aeneas ordered the pressing crowd to withdraw from a wide course to open a circuit.

_Faces of Old Troy_

The boys came marching together while parents were watching. Horses’ bridles glistened. All of the people of Troy and Trinacria cheered and admired when they passed by. Each had crowned his hair with a circlet, according to custom, and each one carried two steel-tipped lances of cornel. Some had shouldered a burnished quiver, or twisted gold around their chests, high, like flexible collars. 550 Three groups of horses in all, each with a roving leader: two groups of six boys in each section glittered in columns and followed respective commanders. A little Priam, recalling his grandfather’s good name—your famous bloodline, Polites, would father Italians—led the first squadron of jubilant youngsters. The leader rode a fine, white-spotted Thracian, pasterns white, and white high on the forehead. Atys was next—his bloodline would lead to the Atii household—
little Atys, a boy loved as a boy by Iulus.

570 Last and finest-looking by far was Iulus himself on a mount from Sidonia given by radiant Dido once—a sign of her love and remembrance. The rest of the boys rode Trinacrian horses of old Acestes. Parents welcomed the shyly nervous youths and applauded. They saw their old parents of Troy in these faces.

Ascanius Leads

Each horse and rider gladly and ritually circled the whole course with relatives watching. A shout in the distance came from Epytus’ son, then a whip-crack—the sign to be ready. They answered by racing apart, three squadrons dissolving and breaking ranks. Signaled again they went wheeling about, trained their lances and rode at each other. First they moved in one, then another direction: opposing groups intertwined in alternate circles, making as if to engage in actual combat. Now bare-backed and fleeing, then turning their lances to charge, at length they made peace and cantered together. As men once talked on Crete’s heights of the Labyrinth’s tricky and winding path which moved past a thousand deceptive by-paths and blind walls (unredeemable error obscured the signs to be followed) eluding observance: the sons of Troy constructed a similar tangle of mounts prancing and playing at war and evasion. They looked like dolphins in splashy Carpathian waters or swimming and veering at play in Libyan whitecaps. Ascanius, first to revive the games when he circled Alba Longa with walls, would make the equestrian march a custom, teaching ancient Latins the practice, just as he rode himself with young Trojan companions.

600 Alba would teach her sons; and far in the future powerful Rome would keep the games to honor her fathers. The boys are still called “from Troy” and their columns are “Trojan.”

Juno and Iris

So far events had taken place to honor Anchises. But Luck now changed. She couldn’t be trusted. While various ritual games went on by the death-mound Juno, Saturn’s daughter, bringing Iris from heaven,
breezed along to the Trojan fleet on an Eastwind, 
plotting things. An old bitterness filled her. 
Iris traveled fast through a bow of a thousand 
colors: seen by no one she quickly descended, 
watched and circled the large crowd on the shoreline. 
She saw the abandoned port—the fleet was unguarded. 
Trojan women, apart on the beach at a distance, 
mourned Anchises’ loss, all of them gazing 
at deep water and weeping. “So much sea and exhaustion” 
(they spoke as with one voice) “and still water confronts us.” 
They longed for a city. Work at sea had oppressed them. 

*Burn the Ships!* 

So Iris flew in the center, aware of her power 
to injure. She doffed the dress and form of a Goddess 
to look like Beroe, the old wife of Doryclus 
from Mount Tmarus, where parents once had children of stature. 
She mingled among Trojan mothers around her 
and said, “What misery not to have died by an Argive 
hand in that war, dragged by the walls of our fathers! 
What doom will Luck prepare for such miserable people? 
Already the seventh year has passed since Troy was demolished. 
Still we trace each coast and channel, every unfriendly 
rock and star, chasing a fugitive Italy, 
borne on the sea’s breadth and tossed by its rollers. 

But here’s land of our brother Eryx and friendly Acestes: 
who’ll stop us from building a walled town for our people? 
You House-Gods rescued from Greeks at Troy in a futile 
gesture, will walls never be called Trojan? I’ll never 
see Hector’s rivers, the Simois, Xanthus? 
No: come with me now to the damned ships and together 
we’ll burn them! Cassandra appeared in my sleep: the form of the 
seer 
gave me a flaming torch, ‘Home for you Trojans 
is here,’ she said, ‘stay here.’ It’s time that we acted: 
the signs are clear, no stalling, the four altars of Neptune 
himself—look!—they’ll give us torches and spirit.” 

*Fear, Doubt and Desperation*

While speaking she avidly seized a dangerous firebrand, 
raised it high first, and with all her power she swung it 
and threw it. She stirred minds and astounded the Trojan 
women’s hearts. One of their number was Pyrgo,
the eldest; she’d nursed many sons in the palace of Priam:
“That’s not Beroe, mothers—not the Rhoeteian
wife of Doryclus—look at the marks of a Goddess:
the burning eyes, grace and spirited footstep,
even the tone of voice and facial expression.

650 I just left Beroe now myself: she’s an ailing
woman alone, upset to be missing the contests,
unable to pray duly and honor Anchises.”
She stopped speaking,
mothers began to doubt, their glances were hostile:
they eyed the ships, torn between painful attachment
to land right there and to realms the Fates had provided.
When Iris rose on balanced wings into heaven,
fly by cloud, trailing the grand arch of a rainbow,
the women were more struck by the omen and driven
to panic. They yelled and grabbed torches, some from an altar,
some from a nearby hearth. Shoots and smoldering branches
flew as Vulcan raged, nothing restrained him:
painted afterdecks, oars and benches were smoking.

Ascanius Rebukes the Women

Shortly Eumelus brought back word of the burning
ships to the stadium seats by the tomb of Anchises.
People turned and saw a floating, darkening ash-cloud.
Ascanius, glad to be leading mounted formations,
quickly and eagerly dashed on his horse to the troubled
camp—his trainers breathless, unable to stop him—

670 “What’s this madness now,” he called out, “where are you off to,
you wretched women? These are no enemy campsites
you burn but your own hopes. I’m your Ascanius,
look!” He threw an empty helmet before them,
worn when he’d charged figures during the war-game.
Aeneas rushed up now with a column of Trojans,
and women scattered in fear. They littered the shoreline,
fled into woods or furtively looked for a hollowed
rockpile somewhere, ashamed of their acts in the daylight.
They changed, recognized family, and Juno was struck from their
bosoms.

Jupiter’s Rain

680 Fire hardly checked its wild assault for that reason:
flame and smoke thrived under the caulking,
puffed and seeped through wet planks, and a clammy
heat gnawed at keels. The whole fleet could succumb to the sickness. Heroic effort and streams of water were futile. Aeneas reverently pulled the cloak from his shoulders, reached to the sky and called on Gods for assistance: “All-powerful Jupiter! Don’t detest to the last man your Trojan people. Not yet—not if your ancient kindness can pity human struggle. Grant that our vessels be saved from the fire, Father: rescue a remnant of Troy from death. Or kill what’s left with your furious lightning if that’s my desert: use your hand to destroy us.”

He’d hardly finished when drops fell from a darkling cloud strangely growling with thunder, it rattled the entire field and hillside, thick and violent torrents rushed from the whole sky, night-dark and gusty with Southwind. Stern-decks filled, oak which had blackened soaked up water: every flame was extinguished. All but four ships were saved from the fire-plague.

*More Trojans Left Behind*

700 Aeneas, still the father, stunned by this bitter setback, shifted now this way and that way. He felt intense concern. Should he stay on Sicilian land and forget the Fates? Or seize an Italian beachhead? An old man named Nautes, singly instructed by Pallas of Triton—she’d made him known for the depth of his knowledge by telling him either the meaning of powerful anger in heaven or things the Fates’ order demanded—used that voice now to comfort Aeneas.

“Son of the Goddess, follow the Fates backward or forward.

710 Whatever happens, all good luck must be earned by endurance. Your friend of divine and Trojan roots is Acestes: take advice for your people, join with him freely, offer him those left from the burned ships and the others tired of huge adventure—things that concern you. Weed out older men, women exhausted from sea travel, whoever is weakening, troubled by danger and wearied: they’ll raise walls in this country, calling their town, if the name is permitted, Acesta.”

Talk like this from an old friend was disturbing:

720 Aeneas felt deeply divided by all of his worries.
Anchises’ Voice

When sable Night reached the zenith, led by her horse-team, Anchises’ fatherly form appeared to have glided down from the sky abruptly. He spoke to Aeneas with vigor: “Once you were dearer than life, when my lifetime lasted, my son. Since Troy’s fate overwhelms you, I’ve come by Jupiter’s order. He routed the fire from your ships: high heaven surely can pity. Take the advice which old Nautes graciously offered. Bring to Italy only men you have hand-picked, the strongest hearts. You’ll have to conquer a rugged, harsh people in Latium. I want you, before that, down in the Hell-God’s home to meet with your father in deep Avernus, my son. I’m not with the somber, evil shadows of Tartarus: pleasant and holy meetings are mine in Elysian Fields. A virginal Sibyl will lead you here when black rams have been slaughtered. You’ll learn of a future city and all your descendents. For now, good-by. Humid Night has wheeled by a midpoint of travel and curt horses of Dawn are breathing behind me.”

Another Troy to Leave

740 He stopped and retreated like thin smoke in a crosswind. Aeneas asked, “Why do you hurry and rush off, who do you run from? What prevents our embracing?” He said no more. He stirred the ash of the sleepy hearth-fire, humbly reverenced Troy’s House-Gods and white-haired Vesta’s inmost shrine with meal and ritual incense. Quickly he called for his friends and foremost Acestes. He told them his dear father’s message and Jupiter’s order. At last in his own mind he’d reached a decision. Discussion was brief: Acestes complied with the order.

750 They transferred women, those who longed for a city; hearts with no great need for distinction could stay here. Others renewed benches, replaced planking on vessels consumed by fire, and adjusted oarlocks and rigging: fewer in number but brave and eager for battle. Aeneas meanwhile sketched a plan for the city, using a plow. He assigned houses and ordered a place called “Troy” and “Ilium.” Pleased with the kingdom, Trojan Acestes marked out a forum and called on the elders
to draft laws. On Eryx’s peak, close to the starlight,

760 they founded a shrine for Cyprian Venus. A priest and an ample
sacred grove remained by the tomb of Anchises.

Sacrifices, Farewells, Departure

For nine days everyone feasted and honored
the altars. The sea lay flat, breezes were gentle.
Then the Southwind blew and re-called them to water.
Loud laments rose on the curved shoreline where people
embraced each other. They waited a night, then a full day.
Now some mothers, the very persons the water
had once seemed harsh on its face to, its name unendurable,
wanted to leave and tolerate every burden of exile.

770 Aeneas had kind and friendly words to console them,
sadly entrusting them all to his blood relation, Acestes.
He finally ordered a lamb killed for the Stormwind,
three bulls for Eryx, and cables loosened in order.
Head trimly circled with leaflets of olive,
standing high on the bow holding a wine-bowl,
Aeneas dropped entrails and streams of wine in the water.
Winds came up astern to attend their departure.
Competing crews, lashing waves, swept through the water.

Venus Implores Neptune for Help

The mind of Venus meanwhile labored with worry.

780 She sought out Neptune; complaints poured from her bosom:
“Juno’s heavy anger and unappeasable passion
drive me, Neptune, to try every entreaty.
No length of time, no one’s goodness can soothe her;
Jupiter’s rule, the Fates—nothing can break her.
She’s not content to destroy with unspeakable hatred
Troy and the Trojan people, to drag a remnant of Trojans
through every ordeal: she’ll even harry a beaten
Troy’s bones and cinders. Who knows the cause of such fury?
She may. You saw yourself her recently massing

790 Libyan seas, her suddenly working and tangling
water and sky, her vainly trusting Aeolian whirlwind.
What brashness—in Neptune’s realm!
See how she drove Trojan mothers to malice,
to wreck ships of the fleet—the act is revolting.
She forced their friends to leave them in foreigners’ country.
I ask, for a final few, for safe time on your water.
Let them arrive in Laurentum and gaze on the Tiber.
The Fates may grant them a city: I ask it be granted.”
Divine Assurance Qualified

The deep sea’s Lord and son of Saturn responded,

800 “It’s wholly right, Cytherean Lady, to trust in my kingdom.
It gave you birth, and earned your trust: I have often
controlled mad or frothing ocean and heavens.
I cared no less on land for Aeneas, the Xanthus
and Simois bear me out: in Troy when Achilles
chased and pinned to a wall your winded detachments,
offering thousands to Death and damming the groan-filled
river, the Xanthus could not discover a channel
to roll seaward. I myself rescued Aeneas
in cave-like mist when he faced the stronger Achilles—

810 his God no match for that strength—though I wanted to uproot
Troy’s foundation, laid by this hand, for its falsehood.
I’m still of the same mind. Away with your worry:
your men will arrive safely in port as you wish near Avernus.
But one must die. They’ll search the seas but he’ll vanish.
A single life for many.”

Sea Spirits on a Calm Sea

That word calmed and cheered the heart of the Goddess.
Neptune yoked wild horses with gold and he fitted
their frothy bits: reins slackened completely,
the sky-blue chariot lightly flew on the wave-tops.

820 Water calmed under the muttering axles.
Swollen waves flattened, cloud ran from the far-flung
sky and various friends appeared: sea-forms like giant
whales, the groups of old Glaucus, Ino’s Palaemon,
scampering Tritons, the whole squadron of Phorcus.
Thea remained to the left with chaste Panopea,
Melite, Spio, Cymodoce, Thalia, Nesaeia.
A lush gladness now jolted the anxious,
fatherly heart of Aeneas. Quickly he ordered
every mast hoisted and sail hung on each yard-arm.

830 They all worked as one: tacking together
to port and to starboard next, canvas unfurling
and sail-yard turning, re-turning when gusts pushed at the
galleys.
Palinurus guided them all, conducting the close-ranked
line: ships were told to follow his movements.
An Ominous Visit from Sleep

Already a dewy Night had fingered the halfway point in the sky, sailors calmly relaxing, loose-muscled, sprawled on hard seats by the oarlocks, when Sleep softly glided down from the highest stars, dividing night-air and ruffling some shadow, looking for you, Palinurus. Bringing a somber dream to a harmless man, the Sleep-God resembled Phorbus and settled high astern. His speech was a wordstream: “Son of Iasus, Palinurus! The sea is conveying your fleet by itself. Winds are steady. It’s time to be resting. Lay down your head—take your tired eyes from their labor. I’ll take your place myself for a while at the tiller.”

The Helmsman Lost

Palinurus hardly moved an eye as he answered, “Me? You want me to turn my back on the gentle waves of a quiet sea? Place trust in that monster, even consigning Aeneas to treacherous sea-wind? Clear skies have tricked or beguiled me too often.” He kept a tight grip on the helm as he answered. He never lost his fix on the stars for an instant. The Sleep-God then rustled a branch near his temple, wet with Lethe drops and the Styx’s hypnotic power: the man’s vision swam and failed though he fought it, a sudden calm had hardly begun to relax him when Sleep, hovering, sheered off a section of stern-deck and tossed helmsman and helm both in the water headlong. The man called to his friends often but vainly. Sleep flew into thin air and ascended on wingbeats. The squadron still pursued its course through the water safely, carried by Neptune’s fatherly promise, unfortified. The fleet already approached a cliff of the Sirens—dangerous once, with white bones by the hundred—a raucous and constant pounding of rocks in the distance. Aeneas realized the ship was yawing and drifting, her helmsman lost. He steered himself through the night-dark sea, often sighing, struck by the loss of a shipmate.

“Ah, Palinurus—too sure of a moderate sea-swell and sky! You’ll lie stripped on some alien beachsand.”