

The Extraordinary Fate of Creusa: Life, Death, and Beyond in Vergil's Troy

While the *Aeneid's* female characters often draw critical attention--Dido, Amata, and Juno are all major characters whose roles have been studied with great interest--Creusa is often overlooked in discussions of the *Aeneid*. Perhaps this oversight is because her role is so different from those of the poem's other female characters: while other females wreak disorder and fight against fate, Creusa champions order and right, urging her family to heed the will of the gods. This paper examines Vergil's treatment of Creusa and her role in the *Aeneid*. Though many other authors and artists in antiquity treat Aeneas' wife only tangentially, Vergil provides several episodes in which Creusa figures significantly. Even though these episodes may not be as numerous as the appearances of some of the *Aeneid's* female characters, Creusa's role is certainly important, culminating perhaps when, at the critical moment, she convinces Aeneas to flee the burning city of Troy with his life.

The focus of this paper is the episode in *Aeneid* 2 where Creusa disappears, after which her shade reappears to Aeneas as a supernatural apparition. Aeneas, throughout his travels in the *Aeneid*, encounters many supernatural figures, including deities, demigods, prophets, and quasi-divine ghosts. Perhaps of all these encounters, his meeting with Creusa's shade is the most unusual, as her qualities and behavior do not correspond to the conventions of any particular supernatural experience. This paper examines the questions of what fate Creusa has suffered and what state her supernatural form represents; these questions have not been treated in detail by many critics, and the answers are not well agreed upon. While many simply understand her to be a ghost--that is, the earthly manifestation of a spirit of a dead mortal--the possibilities of her death and/or burial raise difficult problems that Vergil does not clearly resolve. In particular Aeneas' uncertainty about how she was lost and the lack of any mention of burial are telling evidence that Creusa has not in fact died, but has been transformed or saved through some other means. In the course of this argument, I systematically examine several conventional fates that may have befallen Creusa (death, apotheosis, miraculous translation) and conclude that none of them could properly apply to her: Vergil intended her fate to be read as unique and extraordinary. Above all, Vergil intended her fate to be seen as something positive and necessitated by the will of the gods: her final appearance should be comforting to her husband and child and release Aeneas from his grief and guilt.

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