

Further reading after *Fireborne: Virgil's Aeneid*

Lee, Annie and others make frequent references in *Fireborne* to their city's cherished ancient epic known as the *Aurelian Cycle*. The majority of these references are adapted from lines in Virgil's *Aeneid*, a Latin epic from the first century B.C.E. about a surviving hero from the losing side of the Trojan War. This reading guide is intended for readers curious about the *Aeneid* and the connections between it and *Fireborne*, highlighting the lines shared between them. In footnotes, context is provided for each line in *Fireborne*, the Latin citation, and the citation in the Fagles translation.

Book 1

Aeneas and his comrades, Trojans who survived the fall of Troy, are shipwrecked in a storm after seven years of wandering. Aeneas is visited by his mother Venus, disguised, who takes him to Carthage and only reveals her true form as she departs – “*And as she turned, it was revealed by her tread that she was a goddess.*”¹

In the court of the Carthaginians, Aeneas meets Queen Dido, with whom he will have an ill-fated and short-lived love affair. Struck by the sorrows he has endured, Dido tells him at their first meeting: “*By my own pain's knowledge have I learned to comfort the sufferings of men.*”² She then begs him to tell her the story of the fall of Troy and, reluctantly, he does.

¹ In Chapter 6 of *Fireborne*, Annie's Dragontongue class gives her a good-luck card before her match with Power with the line: “*And as she turned, it was revealed by her tread that she was fireborne*” (143).

Latin: *Et vera incessu patuit dea* I.405

Fagles: “*and her stride alone revealed her as a goddess*” I.491

² In Chapter 5, Julia tells Lee: “*By my own pain's knowledge will I comfort the sufferings of men*” (131).

Latin: *Non ignara mali miseris succurrere disco* I.630

Fagles: “*Schooled in suffering, now I learn to comfort those who suffer too*” I.751-2

Book 2

Aeneas recounts the sacking of Troy, starting with the Trojans' dubious decision to bring a giant wooden horse built by the Greeks inside their walls, and then describing the ambush that began in the night when the Greeks hiding inside the horse emerged and sacked the city. Aeneas survives because Hector, recently slain by Achilles, appears to him in his dream, urging him to flee. "*Alas, flee, goddess-born, you and your family. Flee from the flames. The enemy has your walls, Troy falls in ruin from its height.*"³

Aeneas goes on to recount his harrowing flight through the city as it is destroyed. In a particularly haunting section, Aeneas pauses in his narrative to address the ashes of the fallen Trojans directly, telling them that he would have earned his death alongside them, if the fates had let him have it. "*To you, Trojan ashes and final flames of my own, I stand witness, I who have escaped neither arms nor any perils of the Greeks in your destruction, and if the fates had been such that I die, I testify I had earned this by my own hand.*"⁴

³ In Chapter 10, the line from the *Aurelian Cycle* that Lee refuses to translate for Tyndale is: "*Alas, flee, dragonborn, you and your family. Flee from the flames. The enemy has your walls, the City falls in ruin from its height*" (265).

Latin (II.289-290):

*"Heu fuge, nate dea, teque his," ait, "eripe flammis.
Hostis habet muros; ruit alto a culmine Troja.*

Fagles (II.364-5):

*"Escape, son of the goddess, tear yourself from the flames!
The enemy hold our walls. Troy is toppling from her heights."*

⁴ In Chapter 12, when the *Aurelian Cycle* is burned, Lee remembers the lines:

*"To you, ashes and final flames of my own, I stand witness
I who have escaped neither peril nor pain in your destruction
If it is our fate to die, then by my own hand let me earn it"* (295).

Latin (II.431-434):

*Iliaci cineres et flamma extrema meorum,
testor, in occasu vestro nec tela nec ulla
vitavisse vices Danaum et, si fata fuissent
ut caderem, meruisse manu.*

Fagles (II.538-41):

*"Ashes of Ilium, 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
if Fate had struck me down, my sword-arm earned it all."*

Subsequent Books

Aeneas' ill-fated love affair with Queen Dido spans books 3-4; his forward march to Rome, which he has been chosen by the gods to found, resumes in Book 5 and continues, despite various setbacks, through to the end of the epic. One of the most memorable of these later books is Book 6, where Aeneas goes down into the Underworld to meet the fallen heroes of the Trojan War and learn what the future has in store for his descendants and the Roman people. On the way, asking for directions from a seer, he is told that the famous words that the descent to Hades is easy, the return difficult – but that “*this is the work, this is the labor.*”⁵

Additional quotation: The *Odyssey*

In chapter 18 of *Fireborne*, Lee tells Annie, “You have given life to me” (402). This is the only quotation in *Fireborne* intended as a reference to Homer rather than Virgil. These are the parting words that Odysseus gives Nausikaa, a princess who saves his life during his journey home. A play on words lost in English is that, while she refers to his life as “zoē,” he changes the root to “bios”, implying that she has not only saved his life – she gave him *human life*.

Greek: σὸν γὰρ μ' ἐβιώσαο, κόρη. VIII.468

Fagles' *Odyssey*: “You saved my life, dear girl” VIII.526

⁵ In chapter 8, at the Lycean Ball, when Dora Mithrides challenges Lee's knowledge of Dragontongue literature, he replies with a quote from the *Aurelian Cycle*: “This is our work; this is our labor” (207).

Latin: *Hoc opus, hic labor est* VI.129

Fagles: “there the struggle, there the labor lies” VI.152

Sources

Virgil, *The Aeneid*. Translation by Robert Fagles.

Homer, *The Odyssey*. Translation by Robert Fagles.

Munda, Rosaria. *Fireborne*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2019.

Original texts accessed on the Perseus Digital Library: www.perseus.tufts.edu/