

hinc primum Fortuna fidem mutata novavit: a new and significant threat faces the Trojans' Roman mission as the Anchises' funeral games come to a close (*Aeneid* 5.604). Salvation is promised – though perhaps not finally achieved – by an encounter between Aeneas' son Ascanius and the Trojan women (ll. 667-79). This paper contends that, despite its lack of certain closure, this encounter sheds important light on Ascanius' role throughout the epic. Ascanius' emphatic self-presentation, and the Trojan women's response to it highlight the importance of his symbolism of the Trojan future, and at the same time encourage readers to appreciate the uncertainties of the destiny he promises.

In setting fire to the Trojan fleet, the Trojan women become enemies to the Trojan cause: their renewed recognition and acceptance of their destiny is imperative if the Roman future is not to be destroyed completely. In his encounter with them, Ascanius encourages the maddened women to remember their role in the Trojans' journey to Rome, telling them that the Homeric past is behind them (671-72), reminding them of the Roman hopes being burnt in the flames engulfing the ships (*vestras spes uritis*, 672), and casting them as partners in his family's Roman quest by calling them *cives* (671). The most important persuasion in Ascanius' speech, however, is himself. With the emphatically demonstrative exclamation *en, ego vester / Ascanius!* (672-73), he throws the helmet he had been wearing in the *lusus Troiae* down on the ground. Both his speech and his action are revelatory, demanding recognition, insistently calling for acknowledgment of what he stands for.

Awareness of the close interrelationship between recognising Ascanius and acknowledging the Roman future in this passage heightens appreciation of his speech. His claim that the women are burning their own hopes as they burn the ships (672) echoes the many times that he is spoken of as the *spes* of his father and his people.¹ When he follows his short speech with self-revelation, he implies that the women are not only threatening the Trojans' divinely ordained destiny, but also threatening him. Will this emotionally charged appeal win the Trojan women over? We cannot be sure. Though the women flee, recognising their kinsmen (*suosque / mutatae agnoscunt*, ll. 678-79), their reaction and Ascanius' emotional speech are separated by the arrival of Aeneas and his men (675). And though the danger to the Roman future is assuaged (and the young prince further upstaged) by his father's prayer to Jupiter to put out the flames (680 ff.), what the women's response to his plea might have been if the other Trojans had not appeared is not revealed. Would they have played the part the young prince set out for them, recognising him and their Roman duty, or would they have continued in their frenzy to act more like the women of Euripides' *Bacchae* than proto-Roman matrons?²

Ascanius' readers are left uncertain about whether he was properly recognised by the Trojan women. The encounter promises a dramatic end to a significant threat, but leaves only the growing realisation that the future he symbolises remains uncertain. This brief meeting thus sheds light on Ascanius' role as a surrogate for Roman destiny, highlighting the ongoing vulnerability of both.

¹ *Aeneid* 1.551-58, 4.272-76, 6.362-65, 10.522-25, 12.168.

² There are significant similarities between Ascanius' attempt to bring the Trojan women to their senses and Pentheus' attempt at self-declaration in Euripides' *Bacchae* (1114-21).