

The Muses' Playground 7

Readings of Vergil's *Aen.* 4 and 5

Issues in Book 4

- Cross links to Book 1, 3, and 5, 6
- The intrusion of the elegiac genre into epic vs. viewing the Dido episode as the necessary love story element of epic (e.g. Heinze)
- The connection to Marc Antony – or Julius Caesar?

The love story

- Book 1: Dido the queen; Aeneas the guest seeking shelter, and Venus' intrigue (note Iulus' role here)
- Book 4: Dido's growing passion; agreement of Juno and Venus; the hunt and the storm (160-172)
- Book 4: Fama; Jupiter; Hermes, Aeneas' wish to speak to Dido; Dido's knowledge
- Book 4: Aeneas prepares departure (but slowly); Dido plans her suicide; Aeneas (prompted by Hermes) departs; Dido speaks to Anna; Dido's pyre and Juno merciful
- Book 6: Dido's shade shies away from Aeneas in the Underworld; he is struck by grief

Dangers of love

- The character arcs for both Dido and Aeneas indicate how love (passion) is a destructive force at cross-purposes with goals and ambitions central to epic: rational decision-making and safe-keeping of the realm
 - Perhaps we can also see the *univira* ideal as relevant in this context; cf. Andromache in Bk 3!
- This is representative of the ancient (and perhaps particularly the Roman) way of viewing strong emotion as an unsuitable basis for life-changing decisions

Dido in Book 1.495-509

[...] Queen Dido in all her beauty arrived at the temple with a great crowd of warriors around her. [...] Dido was like Diana, and like Diana she bore herself joyfully among her people, urging on their work for the kingdom that was to be. Then in the doorway of the goddess, under the middle of the vault of the temple, she took her seat with her armed guards about her. There, as she was giving laws and rules of conduct to her people, and dividing the work that had to be done in equal parts or allocating it by lot, Aeneas suddenly saw...

- Preceding passage: Aeneas struck dumb by the reliefs on the doors of the Juno temple – placed in a passive position?
- Clear credit is given to Dido's efficiency as ruler of Carthage, and to the wealth of the city
- The links to the *Odyssey* might make us expect a strong queen character (cf. Arete) – but Dido's character comes to conflate both Arete, Nausicaa and Calypso

Contrast

- Note that Anna's advice puts the advantages of marriage to Aeneas in the context of protecting Carthage (4.45-49) – no matter how misguided it is
- *The towers she was building ceased to rise. Her men gave up the exercise of war and were no longer busy at the harbours and fortifications making them safe from attack. All the work that had been started, the threatening ramparts of the great walls and the cranes soaring to the sky, all stood idle. (4.86-89)*

Dido before the hunt

- *She came at last with a great entourage thronging round her. She was wearing a Sidonian cloak with an embroidered hem. Her quiver was of gold. Gold was the clasp that gathered up her hair and her purple tunic was fastened with a golden brooch. (4.136-139)*
- Cf. the arrival scene in Bk 1: now the throng has negative associations
- Dido dressed in luxury
 - Implies she's wasting the assets of her city
 - The meaning of purple
 - Connects her to female lovers in Roman love elegy:
 - *If you would have her move in a gleam of Cos, this whole book will be of Coan silk (Prop. 2.1.5f)*
 - Cf. qualities and threat posed by the mistress of elegy

Dido as an elegiac character

- Dido is, however, also like the male lover of elegy:
 - She, too, is made passive by her love
 - Her love is described consistently in the terms of a wound and a burning fire – this language recurs in elegy
 - Her hesitation and the fact that she is torn back and forth between different options and emotions also corresponds closely to what we see in elegiac characters
- An intrusion of genre?
 - Verg. *Ecl.* 10 interacts closely with the elegiac genre through putting the elegist Gallus centre-stage
 - Does Gallus there and Dido here offer a reading of the elegiac genre?
- Imitatio and aemulatio:
 - Book 4 shows Vergil incorporating not only Homeric elements, but the elegiac aspects of Dido's story also highlights his engagement with contemporary literature

Prop. 1.6: An example of love elegy

I'm not afraid to discover the Adriatic with you, Tullus, or set my sail, now, on the briny Aegean: I could climb Scythian heights, or go beyond the palace of Ethiopian Memnon. But, clinging there, my girl's words always hinder me, her altering colour: her painful prayers. All night she goes on about passion, and complains there are no gods, since she's forsaken. Though mine, she denies herself to me, she threatens, as a hurt lover does a man she's angry with.

I'll not live an hour among such complaints: O let him perish who can make love, with them, at his ease! What use is it for me to discover wise Athens, or see the ancient treasures of Asia, only for Cynthia to cry out against me when the ship's launched, and score her face with passionate hands, and declare she owes kisses to the opposing winds, that nothing is worse than a faithless lover?

You can try and surpass your uncle's well-deserved power, and re-establish our allies' ancient rights, since your youth has never made room for love, and you've always loved fighting for your country. Let that Boy never burden you with my labours, and all the marks of my tears! Let me, whom Fate always wished to level, give up this life to utter worthlessness. Many have been lost, willingly, in wearisome love: earth buries me also among that number. I'm not born fitted for weapons or glory: this is the war to which the Fates would subject me.

But whether you go where gentle Ionia extends, or where Pactolus's waters gild the Lydian fields, your feet on the ground, or striking the sea with your oars, you'll be part of the accepted order: then, if some hour comes when I'm not forgotten, you'll know I live under cruel stars.

Aeneas in the world of elegy?

- *As soon as his winged feet touched the roof of a Carthaginian hut, he caught sight of Aeneas laying the foundations of the citadel and putting up buildings. His sword was studded with jasper, and glowing with Tyrian purple there hung from his shoulders a rich cloak given him by Dido into which she had woven a fine cross-thread of gold.* (4.259-264)
- *'So now you are laying foundations for the high towers of Carthage and building a splendid city to please your wife?'* (4.265-267)
- Has Aeneas set aside his duty in exactly the same manner as the lover poet of Propertius?
- That is problematic in and by itself...
- ...but to the contemporary audience even more so because his acceptance of Eastern habits recalls Anthony's affair with Cleopatra – as emphasised in Augustan propaganda:
- *Such being his temper, the last and crowning mischief that could befall him came in the love of Cleopatra, to awaken and kindle to fury passions that as yet lay still and dormant in his nature, and to stifle and finally corrupt any elements that yet made resistance in him of goodness and a sound judgment. He fell into the snare thus* (Plut. Ant.xx)

Antony and Cleopatra coinage



Hor. *Carm.* 1.37: The threat of the East

Now's the time for drinking deep, and now's the time to beat the earth with unfettered feet, the time to set out the gods' sacred couches, my friends, and prepare a Salian feast.

It would have been wrong, before today, to broach the Caecuban wines from out the ancient bins, while a maddened queen was still plotting the Capitol's and the empire's ruin,

with her crowd of deeply-corrupted creatures sick with turpitude, she, violent with hope of all kinds, and intoxicated by Fortune's favour. But it calmed her frenzy

that scarcely a single ship escaped the flames, and Caesar reduced the distracted thoughts, bred by Mareotic wine, to true fear, pursuing her close as she fled from Rome,

out to capture that deadly monster, bind her, as the sparrow-hawk follows the gentle dove or the swift hunter chases the hare, over the snowy plains of Thessaly.

But she, intending to perish more nobly, showed no sign of womanish fear at the sword, nor did she even attempt to win with her speedy ships to some hidden shore.

And she dared to gaze at her fallen kingdom with a calm face, and touch the poisonous asps with courage, so that she might drink down their dark venom, to the depths of her heart,

growing fiercer still, and resolving to die: scorning to be taken by hostile galleys, and, no ordinary woman, yet queen no longer, be led along in proud triumph.

Averting the threat

- Aeneas' change of heart is only very gradually realised in action: he is struck dumb by Mercury's appearance, but is very uncertain of how to act (seeks advice) and how to address Dido
- It is only thanks to Jupiter's advice that he does not engage with the queen in debate, and 4.361 *'It is not by my own will that I seek for Italy'* underlines his lack of decisiveness
- Only Mercury's further urging 4.560-570 finally prompts his leaving

Tension building across Book 4

- Book 3 has just emphasised Andromache's faithfulness to Hector as both pointless and noble
- Book 3 is told to Dido while she herself, a longstanding *univira*, is gradually coming to give up her devotion to Sychaeus
- While in a sense representative of old Roman values, the *univira* ideal was not in line with the aims of Augustus' marriage laws
- Tension is maximised: the reader knows that Dido's love will fail, but is still made to ask themselves if it couldn't, perhaps, be a good idea

Dido and the narrator

- The issue of focalisation: In Book 4 the sense of dramatic irony is constantly underlined by the contrast between Dido's perception and that of the all-knowing narrator:
- *Dido in all her beauty would hold a sacred dish in her right hand and would pour wine from it between the horns of a white cow [...] she would stare into their breathing entrails to read the signs. But priests, as we know, are ignorant. What use are prayers and shrines to a passionate woman?*
- *Dido and the leader of the Trojans took refuge together in the same cave. The sign was first given by Earth and by Juno as a matron of honour. Fires flashed and the heavens were witness to the marriage while nymphs wailed on the mountaintops. This day was the beginning of her death, the first cause of her sufferings.*

Dido and the narrator

- Similes continually serve to underline Dido's (involuntary?) inability to see her situation clearly but at the same time play out her story once more:
 - From Diana (Bk 1) to wounded hind (underlining the reversal of roles between Dido and Aeneas)
 - **No** simile just before the hunt: touch-and-go
 - As a frenzied bacchant 301f
- The similes work as epic framings
 - ...considerably more complex than Homeric similes
- ...and thus further remind us that the story has to return to its epic trajectory and that the elegiac material can only be allowed a very limited space

Nevertheless, sympathy for Dido?

- What lioness gave birth to you from her lonely crag? What sea, conceived by foaming waves, has spit you out? What Syrtis, what predatory Scylla, what endless Charybdis gave you birth, you who return such rewards for living sweet? (Cat. 64.xx)
- You are a traitor. You are not the son of a goddess and Dardanus was not the first founder of your family. It was the Caucasus that fathered you on its hard rocks and Hyrcanian tigers offered you their udders. (Verg. Aen. 4.365-367)
- Narrator apostrophe's to Dido express sympathy for the character – more frequent here than in any other book
- The strong allusion to Catullus' Ariadne might imply that Dido is as blameless as Ariadne here
- Juno/Iris as an author stand-in at the close of the book

To take away