

The Muses' Playground: The *Aeneid* and the female

A) Sacrifice, suffering and defeat

male world (patriarchal; empire-building; masculine genre): females helpless/excluded

1) "Leave peace and war to men. War is the business of men" (Allecto as Calybe to Turnus Verg. *Aen.* 7.444)

2) "The happiest of all Trojan women was the virgin daughter of Priam who was made to die by the tomb of her enemy Achilles.... Polyxena did not have to endure the casting of lots or live to be the slave of a conqueror and lie in a master's bed! But we saw our home burned ... We ... bore him [Achilles' son] a child in slavery." (Andromache, Verg. *Aen.* 3.321-7)

3) "Those whose fate it was to die beneath the high walls of Troy with their fathers looking down on them were many, many times more fortunate than I." (Aeneas in storm, Verg. *Aen.* 1.94-6)

4) "there, far apart on the deserted beach, were the women ..., weeping ... How weary they were, how ... vast the sea that still remained for them to cross!" (Verg. *Aen.* 5.613-7)

5) "The Trojan women are constructed here as the quintessential Other... the text emphasizes that the Trojan society is divided within itself and ... that the masculine segment is appropriately ascendent over the feminine. During the ...funeral games, in which the men and boys act out essential group values emphasizing competitiveness, excellence, and the acquisition of rewards ..., the women are isolated, excluded and mournful." (Nugent 1992)

defeat of active females: Dido? (image of Penthesilea *A.* 1.490-1), esp. Camilla and Juno; cf. Penthesilea (Camilla comparison 11.659-636); defeat of female deities

female sacrifice: Creusa; Dido; Amata; Camilla (Turnus substitute); Juturna (cf. Anna, who will become a river goddess); Lavinia; Iphigenia

6) "...nurse, send my sister Anna .. to me, telling her to sprinkle her body with river water and take with her the animals and the other offerings as instructed... your own forehead must be veiled with a sacred ribbon. I have prepared with due care offerings to Jupiter of the Styx..." (Dido, Verg. *Aen.* 4.634-8)

7) "her resolve to leave the light was strengthened when she was laying offerings on the incense-breathing altars..." (Verg. *Aen.* 4.451-3 > Dido sees ill-omens)

8) "her life left her with a groan and fled in anger down to the shades" (Camilla, Verg. *Aen.* 11.831) = 12.952 (of Turnus' fate)

9) "the ruler of lakes and roaring rivers, an honour granted by Jupiter the High King of Heaven as the price of her ravished virginity." (**Juturna**, Verg. *Aen.* 12.139-41)

10) "in doubt and confusion and wounded to the heart" (Juno leaves Juturna, Verg. *Aen.* 12.160)

11) “But whose will is it that you have been sent down from Olympus to endure this agony? Was it all to see the cruel death of your pitiable brother?” (Turnus to Juturna, Verg. *Aen.* 12.634-6)

12) “*unguibus ora soror foedans et pectora pugnis*” (Juturna, Verg. *Aen.* 12.871) = 4.673 (of Anna, who in myth becomes a river goddess)
 (“a sister fouling her face with her nails and her breast with her fist”)

13) “So this is immortality! Will anything that is mine be sweet to me without you, my brother? Is there no abyss that can open deep enough to take a goddess down to the deepest of the shades?” (Juturna, Verg. *Aen.* 12.882-4; tr. Walsh)

14) “For me the Trojans will build the walls of a city and Lavinia will give it her name.” (Verg. *Aen.* 12.194: name, sign of union, most important thing about Lavinia?)

15) “When Lavinia heard these words ..., her burning cheeks were bathed in tears and the deep flush glowed and spread over her face. As when Indian ivory has been stained with blood-red dye, or when white lilies are crowded by roses and take on their red, such were the colours on the maiden’s face.” (Verg. *Aen.* 12.64-9: why blush? Modesty? Passion for Turnus?)

16) “her daughter Lavinia was the first to tear her golden hair and rosy cheeks” (Verg. *Aen.* 12.606, at Amata's death)

17) “When you Greeks first came to Troy you killed a virgin and appeased the winds with her blood.” (of Iphigenia, unnamed, Verg. *Aen.* 2.116-7)

males also sacrificed: helmsman Palinurus; Nisus and Euryalus (Tarpeian rock on Capitol used as site of sacrifices)

18) “He [Aeneas] will arrive safely where you wish, at the harbour of Avernus. Only one will be lost. One only will you look for in vain upon the sea, and that one life will be given for many.” (Verg. *Aen.* 5.813-15)

19) “If there is any power in my poetry, the day will never come when time will erase you from the memory of man, while the house of Aeneas remains by the immovable rock of the Capitol and the Father of the Romans still keeps his empire.” (Verg. *Aen.* 9.446-9)

B) Further Voices

sympathy and pathos; further voices presenting oppositional viewpoint (e.g. comment on Aeneas’ impious behaviour; Cleopatra's welcoming embrace by Nile)

20) “If the dominant voice of the *Aeneid* (particularly that of father and son) affirms the value of empire and institutional goals and constructs, the female voice (the mothers) may be used to articulate differing positions or critiques. Such alternatives, however, insofar as the poet chooses to have them voiced by women, are simultaneously muted in the text.” (Nugent 1992)

21) “My hypothesis is that this collocation of departure, female casualty, denied responsibility, and *pietas* is intended to reflect an incomplete humanity in Aeneas and in the

pietas which he exemplifies.” (Perkell 1981)

C) females as obstructions

agents of delay (esp. causing war; men e.g. Galaesus, Latinus, Jupiter, often attempt peace): Creusa; Dido (love and hate); Trojan women; Lavinia; Silvia; Amata; Juno; Allecto

22) “It was prophesied that her own fate and fame would be bright, but that a great war would come upon the people.” (of Lavinia, Verg. *Aen.* 7.79-80)

tendency towards regression: e.g. Andromache; Dido; Juno (“unforgetting anger”)

exceptions (identifying with Roman goals): Venus; Cybele who saves Creusa and protects ships (temple next to Augustus' house on Palatine)

D) Chaos and change

passion: sexual (Dido; Pasiphae; Sirens) and non-sexual (Dido; Trojan women; Euryalus' mother)

instability e.g. Dido (changeable behaviour; like a Bacchant); Allecto (like a spinning top): females in male world

23) “Women are unstable creatures, always changing.” (Mercury to Aeneas, Verg. *Aen.* 4.569-70)

24) “Not for her girlish hands the distaff and wool-basket of Minerva. She was a maid inured to battle, of a fleetness of foot to race the winds.” (Camilla, Verg. *Aen.* 7.805-7)

25) “blind to all else and unthinking, she tracked him through the whole army, burning with all a woman's passion for spoil and plunder.” (Camilla, Verg. *Aen.* 11.781-2)

metamorphosis (Circe who turns men to animals; Juturna > Camers and Metiscus; Venus as huntress; Amata pretends to be a Bacchant cf. Helen at fall of Troy)

uncontrolled natural forces: storms and winds (Juno; Cleopatra Verg. *Aen.* 8.718-20); fire (women burning the ships)

Contrast: males associated with order e.g. Neptune: statesman simile; Aeneas; Augustus (in control at Actium; Agrippa has “favouring winds”)

E) The Eastern threat

East and female: Dido (cf. Medea) and Cleopatra; effeminate East (cf. Augustan propaganda): Troy

F) Genre and gender?

epic as male genre (purposeful)? romance as female (digressive, delaying). Negativity inherent?

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