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# VIRGIL'S EPIC TECHNIQUE

*Richard Heinze*

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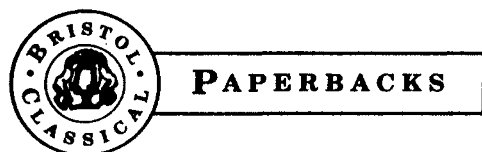
Preface by Antonie Wlosok

Second Edition with Index of Citations



Apollonius τάχα δ' ἐγγύθεν ἀντεβόλησαν ἀλλήλοις, Ἄργος δὲ παροίτατος ἔκφατο μῦθον (2.1121-2) [soon they drew near and met each other, and Argus spoke first].

114 **45.** The ethos of Aeneas' parting words to Helenus and Andromache is indeed the ethos of the whole book: *vivite felices, quibus est fortuna peracta iam sua; nos alia ex aliis in fata vocamur* (493-4) [live, and prosper, for all your adventures are past. We are called ever onwards from destiny to destiny].



# 3

# *Dido*

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History told of the voluntary suicide of Queen Dido, whereby she kept faith with her husband Sicharbas beyond the grave. When she saw no other escape from an enforced marriage with Iarbas, she mounted the funeral-pyre. Some poet, perhaps Naevius,[1] freely reworked this story in the style of Hellenistic love-poetry, and sent 116 to the funeral-pyre not the ever-faithful widow but the woman that Aeneas has loved and abandoned. Virgil has adopted this version, and consequently it has become famous, but the consciousness that it is a poetic fiction has not been lost; no historian, as far as we know, has granted it so much as a mention.[2] Even in Virgil the original picture of Dido shines through beneath his new over-painting; not only in the importance that Virgil still assigns to the motif of her loyalty to her dead husband: when Dido laments that she has allowed her sense of shame to die and has ruined her reputation, the one thing by which she had been hoping to gain immortality (4.322), there is a memory – no doubt unconscious – of that Dido who went to her death for the sake of loyalty, and so won for herself immortal fame.

Thus when Virgil incorporated Dido into his epic, it was certainly not because he was forced to do so by the strength of established tradition.

Nor was he constrained to do so for technical reasons, such as the need to provide someone to listen to Aeneas' story; Acestes, for example, could have fulfilled this function. It was simply that Virgil regarded a love story as an integral part of an epic. Circe and Calypso, Hypsipyle and Medea urgently demanded a counterpart if Aeneas' experiences were not to look jejune in comparison with those of Odysseus and Jason; moreover, Virgil's ideal was the greatest possible richness and the utilization of all possible epic motifs. As soon as Virgil's attention was drawn, by some 117 earlier poetic version, to the woman who founded Carthage, we can imagine how his gaze will have lingered on her, spellbound; she was indeed ideally suited to the poet's purpose. History knew, of course, of other liaisons of Aeneas: he is said to have fathered a son by the daughter of Anius (Serv. on 3.80), and in Arcadia they knew of two daughters born to him by Codone and Anthemone (Agathyllus cited by Dion. Hal. 1.49); but what were these unknown girls compared with the most powerful queen known in the history of the west, the founder of the only city which was to threaten Rome? And what a perspective this struggle between Rome and Carthage, a struggle that was to affect the history of the entire world, gave to the encounter, first friendly, then hostile, of their two founders! But as soon as Virgil had envisaged the possibility of including Dido, then she was the obvious person to listen to Aeneas' tale – possibly Naevius suggested this idea too.[3] Virgil was doubtless proud of having discovered new and fruitful developments of the Homeric device of recounting adventures: Dido's burgeoning love impels her to her urgent questioning, and Aeneas' narrative of his deeds and disasters vastly intensifies her love, which thus becomes the motivation of the action.[4]

The tragic outcome of this love was taken over by Virgil from his predecessor. If it was Naevius, he can hardly have provided more than the barest skeleton of events; 118 the treatment is entirely Virgil's. There is probably no part of his epic where he stands at a further remove from Homer than here; and he seems to have been fully aware of what he was doing. If it was indeed his ideal to come as close as possible to early epic without losing those improvements and new developments of later times which he valued, then here he was entering a world which had really only been discovered since Homer's time: the portrayal of love as a passion which both floods the soul with rapture and at the same time destroys it. Homer does not say much about love; goddesses may not send their beloved hero on his way gladly, but nevertheless they do so with the carefree spirit that is characteristic of Homer's divinities: Calypso provides food for the journey, Circe gives directions for the journey, there are no fond words of farewell.[5] Apollonius, who is quite modern in his portrayal of Medea's vain struggle against overwhelming passion, nevertheless does not go far beyond the restrained tone of the ancient epic in his account of the episode on Lemnos, even though in itself it is analogous to the tale of Dido. We are given the farewell words of Hypsipyle and Jason, it is true, and there is talk of tears and the clasping of hands; but the couple seem to understand each other perfectly. Hypsipyle never counted on holding her beloved guest captive for ever; it does not occur to her to chide him for leaving her. The essential thing here is the event; Apollonius hardly even touches on the emotions involved. Virgil had chosen to use the form of the epic because he valued it above all for the opportunity that it gave him to create strong emotional effects. There was no lack of models and precedents: in no area was the last flowering of Greek poetry more inventive than in searching out all the dangers and misfortunes of consuming passion, love unknown or love deceived or unlawful love, which drove its victim through sorrow, shame and despair to suicide. Such themes, admittedly, had hardly ever yet formed the subject of an epic: the Hellenistic period had created for itself a new vehicle, the epyllion, 119 that was ideally suited to the new material. Virgil's poem about Dido, complete and self-contained, certainly had some kinship with that classical miniature form of narrative: but it is quite clear that, despite the subject-matter, the poet was striving to achieve and maintain the heroic tone of the epic. In this he was given invaluable help by drama: there he could learn how to treat his material in an elevated style, and he did not scorn this help.[6] The analysis which follows is an attempt to unravel the technique of Virgil's tragic epyllion into its component parts.

## 1. Scene setting: love

The fourth book is devoted to Dido. She dominates the scene to such an extent that the epic hero plays a secondary role. At the beginning of the book we find her caught in the toils of love. She attains her heart's desire; then comes the *peripeteia* of the drama, leading to a rapid plunge from the heights of happiness and to the fatal conclusion. The ground for this tragedy is laid in Book 1 in the full detail which is one of the advantages that an epic poet has over a dramatist.

Dido's entrance is prepared in two ways. First, Aeneas hears about her from





Venus; the narrative is ingeniously contrived so that it not only informs us but also wins our sympathies.[7] The listener is moved first to pity, then to admiration: here is 120 a princess wounded to the depths of her soul, who pulls herself together, and whose misfortune gives her the strength to overcome her feminine frailty, to perform deeds of masculine daring – *dux femina facti* [the enterprise was led by a woman] – and, a mere woman, to venture to found a city amongst barbarian tribes, a city whose beginning prefigures its future greatness. Secondly, Aeneas sees Dido's achievement, the city itself, and is astonished by its magnificent lay-out and the swarming activity of the builders, in which the spirit of their queen is reflected (1.420-36); her humanity, which honours the greatness of another race, and pities their sufferings, is shown by the paintings in the temple, which also tell him that his own name and achievements are not unknown to the queen (456ff.).

Only now does Dido herself appear, and her appearance fully lives up to the expectations that Virgil has aroused in us: she enters in regal majesty with a royal retinue, with royal dignity.[8] So far, Aeneas has only admired her works, but now he sees her in action; so far, he has been hoping that she will show a sense of humanity and nobility, and now these hopes are fulfilled by the reception which she accords to the Trojan suppliants. Thus everything conspires to prepare the ground most propitiously for the long-awaited personal encounter between Aeneas and the queen, which now ensues.

All this is a piece of scene-setting which I believe to be without parallel in ancient narrative literature. Individual details are borrowed from Odysseus' reception by the Phaeacians: just as Venus tells Aeneas about Dido, so Athena tells 121 Odysseus about Arete; Aeneas is astonished by the sight of Carthage, as Odysseus is by the harbours and ships, squares and walls in the city of the Phaeacians (*Od.* 7.43ff.). But it is easy to see how much more significant the two motifs have become in Virgil, since they both prepare the way for what is to come: Aeneas is to fall in love with the princess whom Venus praises so highly to him, and he is to take up and continue her work of building the city whose greatness and progress he so admires. Everything that he sees and experiences in the temple of Juno is calculated to make Aeneas, and with him the reader, admire Dido more and more, and this has no parallel in the *Odyssey*; Virgil's inspiration is a truly dramatic one: the poet transforms everything that he has to tell us about his heroine into action, which is carried forward by Aeneas. Thus not only has he already been won over to Dido before he has even exchanged a single word with her; the reader, too, receives an impression at her first entrance comparable to the impression that we experience in a drama at the first entrance of a principal character, about whom intense expectations have been aroused by an ingenious exposition – think for example of *Tartuffe* or *Egmont* – and Virgil can count on the reader's ready acceptance of what the Fates have in store for Dido in Book 4, since they have already begun to spin their thread.

Dido, too, for her part, has long and gradually been prepared for the appearance of Aeneas. It was from Teucer, after the fall of Troy, that she had first heard his name, and it had been from the lips of an enemy that she had first heard his praises (1.619ff.); she knows that he is the son of Venus. The battles around Troy and the part that Aeneas played in them are known to her in every detail. She has used a representation of them to adorn the principal temple of her new city, the temple in

which she herself is accustomed to sit upon the throne. And now she hears the king praised by his own men, and hears of their unconditional trust in him; no wonder that she is moved to wish to see him for herself. Scarcely has she uttered this wish than he is suddenly standing before her like some divine apparition,[9] in a state of [122] exaltation brought about by his pride in what he has just heard, his joy that his companions and he himself have escaped death, and his admiration for Dido's regal manner: 'his divine mother had breathed the splendour of youth over him' is how Virgil, in truly Homeric fashion,[10] explains this enhancement of his nature at that moment, and the effect which his appearance will have on Dido.

Since the ground has been prepared on both sides, we might expect that mutual love will flare up at first glance. In Hellenistic love poetry, the sudden arousal of a passion, as quick as lightning, is actually a 'rule of artistic representation',[11] and this rule is also obeyed by the narrative of Apollonius' epic, at least as far as Medea's passion is concerned: she is struck by Eros' arrow as soon as she sets eyes on Jason, and her whole being is immediately overwhelmed by love (3.275ff.), while Jason ignores her completely at first, and it is only much later, during their secret conversation, that he himself is inflamed by the tears of the woman (1077f.). Medea is won over by the mere sight of him, by the heroic beauty of the man; indeed, in all the Hellenistic love poets that is the only reason why people fall in love. We have seen how Virgil has prepared the way for the mutual attraction of Dido and Aeneas by much subtler psychological means; similarly he does not ascribe the power to ignite [123] a brilliant flame to a mere glance, despite the careful way in which he has assembled the flammable materials. It is true that these two are not to be compared with those youths and maidens who know nothing of Eros and, unprepared, fall victim to an unfamiliar passion. Virgil has completely avoided all mention of Aeneas' feelings of love. It is only at their separation that we are explicitly shown by means of small touches how deeply in love he has been. For the rest, the poet allows the facts to speak for themselves, after he has prepared the emotional ground as thoroughly as possible: Aeneas' feelings of admiration, and his sympathy and pity for Dido's former sufferings are combined with gratitude, which he expresses in extravagant words (597ff.). Dido's subsequent behaviour, her heartfelt and obvious attraction to the supposed Ascanius, and her passionate involvement with Aeneas' own fortunes are enough to do the rest. Later, there is no longer any need to state explicitly that her love is reciprocated: if a hero like Aeneas can forget his divine mission for the sake of a woman, even for a short time, how overwhelming his passion must be![12] [124] Dido, too, has to forget, before she can open her heart to the new emotion: she is still attached to Sychaeus, the husband of her youth, and feels that it is her duty to remain faithful to him, and she fears that if she forms a new attachment she will be doing wrong to her first husband. So it would be inappropriate for her, too, to be suddenly pierced by an arrow shot at her by Eros, in the way that many other poets,[13] including Apollonius, had depicted the onset of love. Virgil follows the traditional technique of Hellenistic love-poetry in so far as he characterizes overwhelming love as the result of an intervention by Amor in person; but he chooses a form which contrives to portray the rapid but gradual invasion of this new love;[14] throughout the [125] first night, while Aeneas talks of his deeds and sufferings, and, as we saw above, talks his way into Dido's heart, Amor lingers between the two in the guise of





Ascanius. But Virgil has also taken care that this intervention by the divinity appears necessary. It is not only a matter of conquering a woman's heart, which would probably not have withstood the heroic appearance of an Aeneas in any case, but it is a matter of Venus taking precautions against Juno's wiles (1.671ff.), since Juno could have used Dido as a means of expressing her hatred: and the only sure defence against the hatred that springs from the will of one god is love that is sent by another.[15]

## 2. Dido's guilt: Anna: passion

Dido's love has first to fight against her sense of duty. Her conversation with her sister (4.9ff.) allows us to witness that struggle, and the victory of love. Virgil has used her traditional faithfulness to her first husband to create a conflict within Dido herself which is of the greatest importance for the action. If Dido's death is to give the impression of poetic justice, she must be burdened with some form of guilt. This guilt lies in her deliberately violating the duty of fidelity which she herself regards as binding.[16] It is *pudor* [a sense of shame] which makes the new marriage impossible for her, and which, only too easily persuaded by Anna's specious arguments, she proceeds to disregard. Similarly, in Apollonius, it is αἰδώς [a sense [126] of shame] that at first restrains Medea; but in her case it is only maidenly decorum that prevents her from entering into a relationship with a strange man without her parents' knowledge; when she has freed herself after a long struggle, she says of it ἐρρέτω αἰδώς (3.784) [away with any sense of shame!]. Dido's *pudor*, on the other hand, is something very different: it is a power which she acknowledges to be divine and under divine protection. This is a specifically Roman way of thinking: a woman's *pudicitia* corresponds as a moral ideal to a man's *virtus*, and of all our evidence of the high regard in which the *univira* [a woman faithful to one husband] was held,[17] none is more characteristic than the information that only 'matrons of known modesty in their first and only marriage'[18] could make sacrifices at the altars of Pudicitia. We know very well how far practice in Virgil's time fell short of this ideal, but we may deduce from Virgil that, at least in the circles which still upheld something of the old Roman values, the requirement as such was maintained. One would dearly like to know the feelings with which Augustus heard these lines; he was Livia's second husband and had been Scribonia's third;[19] but to judge by the general tendency of his politics, and the way in which he kept his politics distinct from his own private life, it is not at all unlikely that he took a sympathetic view of a requirement which could only promote the reinstatement of the sanctity of marriage which he strove after so passionately. In any case, Virgil intended to show that Dido was a woman of the highest moral character by making her feel that this requirement was a moral and religious duty; she fails in this duty after its basis, her *love* for her first husband, has disappeared; but she does not escape the torture of a repentant conscience (4.552) and she pays for her guilt by her death (457ff.); and she is reunited with Sychaeus in the Underworld (6.474).

Tradition provided Dido with a sister, Anna. Virgil entrusts her with an important role, important, however, for his narrative technique rather than for the development [127]

of the action: the rôle of confidante. At first one is inclined to make comparisons with Medea's sister, Chalciope, in Apollonius' poem, but she is a character who is required by the action, and Medea does not confide in her: on the contrary, she hides her personal feelings from her, and at the decisive moment, when she flees from her country, she acts quite independently, without consulting her sister. Here, too, Apollonius adheres strictly to the epic style. The confidante is a technical device, invented for the purposes of the theatre, taken over as a stock figure by classicizing tragedy from ancient tragedy (*Medea*, *Phaedra* etc.). Her function is to allow the audience to discover things which only one character can and does know; in this way the author can share her hidden feelings with the spectator, and create and overcome objections, without continually falling back on the device of the monologue.[20] The epic poet can use narrative instead of monologue, or alternate the two, a technique which Apollonius himself uses with great success. Virgil reserves monologue for the emotional climaxes of his narrative; in the earlier stages of the Dido episode he makes use of the confidante to transform epic narrative into dramatic action. Virgil's confidante is not the trusty nurse or maidservant who stands at the heroine's side in drama and who so often acts as the go-between in the romantic literature of the Hellenistic age,[21] serving her mistress' passion with blind obedience, taking no heed of duty or honour. There is usually something rather vulgar about this figure, and anything of that kind would be inconsistent with Virgil's concept of the elevated style that epic demands. He may on one occasion send the *nutrix* [nurse] (Barce 4.632) on an errand, but her status is too inferior to that of the 128 queen for her to have any influence on her decisions, or to receive her humiliating confessions and convey her requests to Aeneas: but Anna, the *unanima soror* [like-minded sister], is ideal for all these purposes. Virgil also makes use of her to raise the emotional level of the final scene, and to portray the *effect* of the terrible event, something that he regarded as very important in every emotional scene: here the grief of the deceived and forsaken sister (675ff.), in whose arms Dido is dying, intensifies the effect that her death has on the reader. Of course, it is possible to imagine what Book 4 would be like without the figure of Anna; it would not affect the action to any great extent; but from an artistic point of view she is of great importance, and it can hardly be true that it was only at a later stage that Virgil added the scenes in which Anna appears;[22] since Virgil envisaged the action in dramatic form from the very beginning, the confidante too had a place in it from the very beginning.

Dido has confided in her sister in order to unburden her anxious heart. She feels the power of new love growing within her; but she feels that it is wrong to yield to it, and with a fearful oath she affirms her apparently steadfast resolve to resist it, as if to give herself something to cling to; thus she herself pronounces judgement on herself in advance. Anna, the *unanima soror*, knows very well what is really going on in her sister's mind, and seeks to dispel her scruples, principally by representing the fulfilment of her heart's desire as politically advantageous, indeed her royal duty. But in view of Dido's religious scruples, she first suggests that she should assure herself of Juno's approval by seeking her *venia* [pardon], or *pax* [peace], as 129 Virgil calls it a few lines later;[23] this then becomes the sisters' first concern. Once the favourable outcome of the sacrifice has released Dido from *religio* [religious





scruple], she is freed from her doubts and scruples, and is able to work with a clear conscience towards the fulfilment of her desires, and in the first place to seek to gain time: then the rest will come about of its own accord. We now hear (56ff.) that Dido follows her sister's advice with the utmost eagerness, and is insatiable in her praying and sacrificing; she turns above all to Juno, *cui vincla iugalia curae* [who is concerned with the bonds of marriage], who is able to dissolve the bonds of a former marriage and validate a new one. She tries to read the will of the gods in the entrails of the sacrificial animals.[24] But what is the result of these sacrifices? Are the entrails favourable or unfavourable? Virgil does not tell us, and so his interpreters have maintained both views with equal conviction and with equal justification. The fact is that Virgil has evaded a difficulty at this point in a rather radical way. We know from the final outcome that the sacrifices cannot have been favourable; otherwise the gods would have been deceiving Dido, or the seer must have been mistaken. On the other hand, if Juno is prepared to go straight ahead and ratify the marriage about which they were consulting her, then the poet cannot possibly say that she refused to accept the sacrifice. So he deliberately leaves the question unresolved. It does not 130 matter what the *vates* [seers] announce; they have no idea what is really agitating Dido's mind,[25] and they no doubt believe that prayers and vows can calm her down, when in fact she has been seized by the frenzy of love, and the flames of love are consuming the marrow of her bones (65-7).

The symptoms of this passion, which are described in lines 68ff., are familiar to us from the romantic literature of the Hellenistic period: torment and restlessness; pretexts for being at least in the company of her beloved;[26] she stammers in his presence;[27] she cannot hear enough of his voice; even when he is absent she still sees and hears no-one but him;[28] even at night she can find no rest;[29] and all the time she neglects the completion of her newly-founded city, to which her days have previously been devoted.[30] But Virgil is careful to avoid anything which might reduce this heroic passion to the level of the sentimental and bourgeois, and he scorns details which are better suited to the miniature technique of the epyllion than to the broad strokes of the epic. Nor does the action stand still while Dido's symptoms are 131 described, for we hear what else is taking place in Carthage, how Dido's subjects cannot remain unaware of her passion, and how her reputation is beginning to be sullied (91); Juno therefore, in order to prevent anything worse and at the same time to serve her own purposes, forms the plan of ratifying the marriage.[31]

The cave in which Aeneas and Dido seek shelter from the storm had its predecessor in the famous cave on Corcyra, which served Jason and Medea as a bridal chamber. There, too, according to Apollonius 4.1141ff., the nymphs sent by Hera enhanced the glory of the celebration. This passage may have been the source of Virgil's inspiration;[32] his mastery can be seen in the natural way in which he motivates what comes about because of the will of the gods, in the vivid descriptions of the splendid hunt and of the storm, and above all in the few lines (166-8) devoted to the fateful wedding, at which flashes of lightning serve as torches and the joyful cries of the nymphs high up on the wooded mountains serve as the wedding song. As Virgil describes the hunt in detail and in magnificent colours, we might imagine that he is merely using the resources of epic style, which glories in description for its own sake; but the passage also has a deeper meaning: the pair are riding forth as if in

a wedding-procession, regally attired, glowing as though with youthful desire, with a splendid retinue, and Virgil has sensed the tragic contrast, that Dido appears to us in radiant happiness for the last time on the day which will fulfil her heart's desire but which will also prove to be 'the first day of her death' (169).

## 132 3. Dido's journey towards death: her character: conclusion

Virgil describes Dido's journey towards death with all the artistry at his command.[33] The *peripeteia* occurs immediately after the climax of the narrative which we have just dealt with; the poet passes rapidly over the period during which the two lovers live peacefully together, as though he were afraid of showing his hero neglecting his duty. We only hear what Fama says (173ff.): she distorts the truth when she depicts the pair as indulging in a life of luxury, unmindful of their duty as rulers; it is only later that we discover that this is untrue, when Mercury finds Aeneas busy with the work of building the city. The gossip reaches Iarbas, Jupiter listens to him and dispatches Mercury, Aeneas immediately obeys his command; Dido hears about his first secret arrangements for departure again from Fama, who thus completes her fatal work. From this point onwards, we accompany Dido along the short path she has yet to tread, which leads her to her death by way of every torment of the soul.[34]

133 Virgil had no need, nor did he consider it his duty, to display originality in the way in which Dido expresses her feelings. Despite the fact that much ancient literature has not survived, there is hardly a single essential feature in Virgil's depiction of her emotions that we cannot find in his predecessors. Here, too, the poet was borrowing his material; his personal contribution was the art by which he transformed it, and this art was so great that Dido is the only figure created by a Roman poet who was destined to have a place in world literature.

The material that was available to Virgil was rich enough. The grief of a forsaken woman had again and again been the subject of Greek poetry of every genre and style. From this mass of material, Virgil from the very first rejected anything which was inconsistent with the dignity of his style as being either too realistic or not realistic enough. Tragedy supplied the earliest example of the figure of the forsaken woman in Medea. During the Hellenistic period there were many such characters of the more dignified love-poetry, more at any rate than we know of today; but we can name Ariadne, whose lament at the loss of her love had been made familiar to the Roman public by Catullus;[35] Phyllis, well-known through Callimachus' poem; Oenone, whose unhappy fate is certainly known to us at any rate from a Hellenistic version (that of Quintus of Smyrna), to say nothing of numerous other comparable poems whose artistic merits have been totally obliterated because of the inadequate information that we have about them. Of these, two, like Dido, committed suicide: Phyllis hangs herself all alone (Ovid *Rem. Am.* 591), Oenone throws herself in the flames of the funeral-pyre which is consuming the body of Paris. But Greek poetry had also often enough recounted the story of unfortunate characters who commit suicide for reasons other than disappointment in love, and Virgil drew upon at least one of these figures, perhaps the most famous of all, the Ajax of Sophocles.

Virgil has made as much use as possible of the abundance of available motifs,





intent as ever on the enrichment of his portrayal. But he does not describe a gloomy, irregular oscillation of the emotions: his Dido is not tossed this way and that by the 134 conflict of her passions. On the contrary, the tragedy strides to its conclusion in a clear and controlled fashion. Here too, Virgil strives as far as possible for dramatic effect. He narrates only the observable action; he does not describe emotions but almost always lets the heroine herself express them. Indeed, he always directs his attention above all to linking the progressive heightening of these emotions closely with the development of the observable action. Each new phase in the outward course of events leads to a new phase in her inner development; and each of these phases represents as purely as possible one particular state of mind, uncontaminated by any other. Her first words to Aeneas (305ff.) express *painful surprise* at his lack of loyalty;[36] she has not yet entirely given up all hope of awakening his pity and sense of obligation towards her. When she realizes from his words that everything is now over, she says farewell in words of *scornful hatred*.[37] She cannot maintain this iron façade for long. When Aeneas' preparations for departure begin to be made 135 openly, she abandons her pride – and the poet makes us realize what this means to someone like Dido – she gives way to *humble renunciation* and begs for at least a short delay so that she will not collapse in the pain of parting (429ff.).[38] This extreme measure does not work: Aeneas remains unmoved; horrifying omens of all 136 kinds appear and Dido decides on death. The preparations for it begin; Dido herself takes part in them; we hear the thoughts that torture her on a sleepless night as her hard-won repose is lost in the storm of her emotions, and these thoughts lead her to the conclusion that death is really the only way out of her sorrow: she has finally come to *despair* about her future.[39] And now, in the grey light of dawn, she sees her fate sealed: the fleet is sailing away. The sudden sight rouses her to extreme *anger*, which is accompanied by a *thirst for revenge*:[40] what her vengeful hand cannot 137 achieve, the curse shall do. But Dido cannot end her life like this, in demented fury. She makes her last arrangements, ensures that her sister will be the first to find her body,[41] and mounts the pyre. Gazing at the silent witnesses of her shortlived happiness she discovers the sublime *peace* of renunciation and takes stock of her life:[42] in full consciousness of her own greatness and of the height from which she has fallen, 138 she takes her leave, unreconciled with her murderer, but reconciled with death.

All this is presented to us as vividly as possible in Dido's own words; only the linking text is supplied by the poet. From the point of view of technique, it is worth noting how Virgil has sought (deliberately, it seems) to avoid, or disguise, the monotony of constant monologues. She confesses her love to her sister. The *peripeteia* is followed by her two speeches to Aeneas, then she entrusts the mission to her sister. The considerations which lead to her final decision (534ff.) are presented not in a monologue but as an account of her thoughts (*secum ita corde volutat* [she communed with herself in her heart]). The sight of the ships sailing away throws her into a demented fury, in which she breaks out into wild cries. She comes to herself, horrified to find that she is talking to herself: *quid loquor? aut ubi sum? quae mentem insania mutat?* (595) ['What am I saying? Where am I? What mad folly is distorting my mind?']. The monologue develops into the prayer and *mandata* [orders], which are naturally spoken aloud. Her final monologue also begins with an apostrophe, as in tragedy.[43]

Virgil will hardly have found individually characterized female characters in his Hellenistic sources; nor can his heroine be compared in this respect with her great tragic predecessors, Deianeira, Medea or Ajax. She is not depicted with any realistic touches that might lead us to think that she was modelled on some living person, nor does she have any peculiar trait of character. On the other hand she is certainly not like some inert musical instrument from which, although it has no feeling, the poet can coax sounds full of pathos. The listener is expected not only to be interested in the state of her emotions, but also to feel personal sympathy for her, as the poet himself unmistakably did. In short, Dido is an ideal portrait of a heroic woman as conceived by Virgil. She therefore has to be portrayed in a way that is essentially negative: she must not be represented as girlishly naïve or timorous;[44] or humble (like so many of Ovid's portrayals of women), or sly, spiteful or barbarically savage 139 (the idea of physically attacking Aeneas to punish him for his faithlessness only occurs to her when she is in a demented state of delirium);[45] moaning and lamentation, sentimental wallowing in her own misfortune, useless regrets that things have happened like this and not turned out differently – Virgil uses all these standard features of tragic monodies and melodramatic Hellenistic scenes extremely sparingly;[46] only at one point, as we have seen, does Dido forget her pride. In contrast to these negative characteristics, Dido is given what seemed to Virgil a truly regal attitude: the deepest *humanitas* [sense of humanity] combined with *magnanimitas* [greatness of soul], displayed magnificently in her last words. Otherwise he dispenses altogether with devices that might have appealed to a poet striving to characterize his heroine – for instance, he could have transformed the masculine firmness of purpose and energy which she had displayed after Sychaeus' death into a dominating trait which she still possessed even in her misfortune; or he could have developed her *humanitas* in accordance with contemporary[47] ethical ideas into a generous forgiveness which would put her enemy to shame; or yet again, he could have brought her consciousness of her royal duty, to which Anna appeals, into the centre of her existence, so that everything else would seem unimportant by comparison: as it stands, we find, somewhat to our surprise, that the dying queen has no concern at all for the future of her city.

Virgil's renunciation of detailed characterization is consistent with the way that he does not attribute Dido's voluntary death to one single motive, but heaps up every imaginable one; sorrow at the loss of her beloved is by no means the motive that predominates. Here Virgil, whether consciously or unconsciously, is under the spell of tradition. For, strangely enough, although poets, particularly of the Hellenistic period, frequently described the suicide of young people who are unhappy in love,[48] and although on the other hand Greek epic and Greek poetry in general 140 frequently described the faithful wife who voluntarily followed her husband to death,[49] there are very few examples of girls or women inflicting an injury on themselves purely because they are disappointed in love, or their love is unreciprocated.[50] Rather, in the majority of cases, the hero or heroine suffers from a sense of shame because of some wrongful or humiliating deed: the threat of dishonour, or horror at their own action makes life unendurable.[51] We have seen that Virgil also introduced a motive of this kind: *non servata fides cineri promissa Sychaei* (522) [the vow which I made to the ashes of Sychaeus is broken] is the thought which sets





the seal on Dido's decision. But that is not all: there is also shame at the insult she has suffered (500ff.), the loss of her reputation for chastity, her greatest claim to fame (322); fear of being abandoned to the enemies who surround her, now that she has even lost the trust of her own subjects (320ff., 534ff.); the horrifying omens of every kind, which increase her fear (452ff.) the voice of her dead husband (457ff.). All these rage within her, and she succumbs to their combined onslaught, not to one single sorrow. Was Virgil seduced here too by the sheer richness of the motives available to him? Or did he think that it was impossible to accumulate too many causes to account for the death of his heroine, to outweigh such a heroic life? Here, too, he has taken care to preserve unity within this multiplicity: the whole of this disaster arises from *one* deed, and it is one man who has turned this deed from a blessing to ruin. We can only admire the skill with which we are made to see the far-reaching consequences of Aeneas' act, one after the other, without being wearied by any longwinded narrative. And this very skill, which allows a *situation* which has been brought about by a single deed to unfold in every direction like some growing plant – this skill irresistibly but imperceptibly convinces the listener of the necessity 141 of the tragic ending, whereas other great poets achieve this effect by letting it emerge from the growth of a deeprooted and individually depicted *character*.

It still remains for us to look at the way in which Dido prepares and accomplishes her death. There was a traditional version of the final scene, which Virgil must have had in his mind's eye:[52] Dido has had a funeral pyre constructed for her on the pretext that she intended to dissolve her former ties by means of a sacrifice to the dead; and on this pyre she kills herself by the sword.[53] Virgil needed only to substitute another pretext that was connected with Aeneas in order to make it convincing. He replaced the sacrifice to the dead with a magic one, that was still suited to the Underworld, so that it could serve as a preparation for her own descent 142 into that realm.[54] But, to the Roman mind, there was something mean and vulgar about magic; they knew of the old witches and wizards who carried on their disreputable trade with love-charms.[55] Virgil must therefore have felt it necessary to transform the whole scene into something great and heroic. The *maga* [witch] is no common witch, but one who has 'guarded the temple of the Hesperides,' and knew how to tame the dragon (483-5);[56] this helps to convince us that she also possesses the other powers of which she boasts: love-magic comes first, but this is followed by 143 magical powers which go beyond those that are normally mentioned and begin to suggest an almost divine omnipotence. The magic ceremony is then performed in a style that is correspondingly elevated: for this occasion no ordinary altar will suffice, but a funeral-pyre, surrounded by altars, is constructed; Erebus and Chaos are invoked, as well as Hecate, the goddess of magic; 'in a voice like thunder' she calls up three hundred gods from the depths. And the sacrifice is so sacred that Dido herself is not too proud to participate as the servant of the gods.[57] For the rest, the magic rite brings about exactly what Dido intends: a death amidst all the mementos of the brief period of joy that her love had brought her.

In tragedy we do not normally witness a death on the stage, but are only affected, like the hero's nearest and dearest, by the impact of the terrible event. So too in Virgil.[58] We do not see Dido plunge the sword into her breast.[59] Virgil's narrative passes over the decisive moment: her handmaidens see her collapse under the mortal 144

blow. Lamentation resounds throughout the halls, and spreads like a raging fire through the streets and houses of the city: we are made to feel the full significance of the death of a woman like Dido, and it is made explicit in Anna's words: *exstinxti te meque, soror, populumque patresque Sidonios urbemque tuam* ['Sister, you have destroyed my life with your own, and the lives of our people and Sidon's nobility, and your whole city too'].[60]

## Notes to Chapter 3

115 **1.** I should not, however, wish to assert this as confidently as the majority of recent scholars have done. Of course, all that we know about Naevius in this connection is preserved in Servius' comment on 4.9: *cuius filiae fuerint Anna et Dido Naevius dicit* [whose daughters, Naevius says, were Anna and Dido]. We might well assume *a priori* that when Naevius first mentioned Carthage he also told the story of its foundation. And it is certainly worth observing that Macrobius states (6.2.31) that Virgil borrowed the tempest, Venus' lament and Jupiter's reassurance in Book 1 from Naevius, but says nothing at all about Dido in this context, whereas at 5.17.4 he makes Virgil responsible for distorting the Dido tradition and spoiling the popular image of her purity, without mentioning any predecessor. But these arguments *ex silentio* are not strong enough to prove that Naevius did not recount the story (as Lucian Müller, assumed: see L. Müller, *Q. Ennius, Eine Einleitung in das Studium der röm. Poesie* [St Petersburg, 1884] 147, and *Q. Ennii carminum reliquiae* [St Petersburg, 1884] XXIII). From Servius' comment on 4.682: *Varro ait non Didonem sed Annam amore Aeneae impulsam se supra rogum interemisse* [Varro says it was not Dido but Anna who was driven by love of Aeneas to kill herself on the pyre] it does not follow with absolute certainty that Varro was correcting the version that appears in Virgil; however, the most likely explanation for his remarkable statement is that Varro, in an attempt to reconcile the historical tradition with the poetical, asserted that, since Dido had killed herself for another reason, then the woman whom Aeneas loved, if indeed he did leave any such person behind in Carthage, can only have been Dido's sister Anna; this expedient would be rather like his favourite method of assuming homonyms in order to reconcile two mutually exclusive versions of a legend. If so, then Varro must have believed that the tradition was more than mere poetic fiction. Unfortunately, it is impossible to establish whether Ateius Philologus in his essay *An amaverit Didun Aeneas* [Whether Aeneas loved Dido] (Charisius I p. 127 K cites this title from Pliny) dealt 116 with this alternative version, or whether he investigated the historical basis of the tradition of Aeneas' and Dido's love (which in my view is more likely). But if the tradition did already exist in the Republican period, then certainly Naevius is the poet most likely to have created it (so too Meltzer – following Niebuhr and others – in Roscher's *Lex.* I.1013); bold and shaky hypotheses of another kind are found in E. Wörner, *Sage von den Wanderungen des Aeneas* (Leipzig, 1882) 17ff. E. Maass implausibly traces Ovid's story of Anna (*Fast.* 3.545ff.) back to Naevius (*Commentatio mythographica* [Greifswald, 1886] XVII), although Naevius had no reason to





mention Anna's eventual fate, and furthermore, if he had used this story, the episode would hardly have suited the purpose which we may assume lay behind his version, that of presenting the Punic War to some extent as the revenge of Dido's people for Aeneas' cruel behaviour. In Ovid, Dido's heiress makes peace with Aeneas, and Dido's people are not mentioned.

**2.** Apart from Malalas (ed. Dindorf [Bonn, 1831]) 162 and Cedrenus (ed. Bekker, [Bonn, 1838]) 1.246, who both depend on Virgil. The story has been attributed to Timaeus, wrongly, as shown by Geffcken, *Timaios' Geographie des Westens*, 47f., and others.

117 **3.** If Dido was the subject of the sentence *blande atque docte percontat quo pacto Troiam urbem reliquerit* [persuasively and artfully she asks how he left the city of Troy]; against this, see F. Leo, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur* (Berlin, 1913) 1.82 n. 8. There is no possibility that Aeneas then told his story in reply: we know from the fragments that the passage was in the third person (F. Noack, *Hermes* 27 [1892] 437).

**4.** Did Virgil perhaps have in Philetas a predecessor in this innovation? He had narrated in his *Hermes* (Parthen. 2), taking his cue from *Odyssey* 10.14, how Aeolus τὰ περὶ Τροίης ἅλωσιν καὶ ὃν τρόπον αὐτοῖς ἐσκεδάσθησαν αἱ νῆες κομιζομένοις ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰλίου διεπυνθάνετο [learned the story of the capture of Troy and how their ships were scattered as they voyaged from Ilium] from Odysseus, and how Aeolus' daughter Polymele had fallen in love with the hero. We do not know what Naevius made of the narrative-device (see above). Ovid (*Ars Am.* 2.127) has Odysseus narrating *Troiae casus* [the fortunes of Troy] to Calypso: apparently his own invention (on the model of Virgil; compare his *iterumque iterumque* [again and again] with *Aen.* 4.19ff.) for the sake of the very Ovidian punchline.

118 **5.** A great contrast to this is Propertius 1.15.11: *multos illa (Calypso) dies incomptis maesta capillis sederat iniusto multa locuta salo* [for many days she (Calypso) sat there sadly, with hair unkempt, making many a complaint to the cruel sea] etc. Propertius takes this behaviour for granted, and there is no need to postulate any specific Hellenistic model for him. Some wretched late author, however, in a stupid attempt to parallel the Dido story, made the goddess Calypso herself commit suicide for love (Hygin. *Fab.* 243).

119 **6.** Cf. Norman Wentworth de Witt, *The Dido Episode in the Aeneid of Virgil* (Diss. Chicago, 1907), where (38ff.) there is a good discussion of the dramatic character of the episode.

**7.** Comparison with the detailed narrative in Justin 18.4 is instructive, in that Justin provides evidence which shows how consciously Virgil strives here to produce an emotional effect, to arouse pity for Dido and indignation against Pygmalion. Hence the repeated emphasis on Dido's love for Sychaeus and Pygmalion's cruel deception after he had killed him, which is revealed to Dido only by the pitiful appearance of his ghost (1.343-56); similarly, the intensification of the crime: *ante aras* [before the altar], *incautum superat* [he caught him off his guard], *inhumati coniugis* [her unburied husband], and Pygmalion's epithets: *scelere ante alios immanior omnis* [a monster of unmatched wickedness], *impius* [impious], *securus amorum germanae* [not concerned for his sister's love], *multa malus simulans* [with many cruel pretences]; the tyrant is hated or feared by his own people (361). That