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THE AENEAS—DIDO EPISODE
AS AN ATTACK ON AENEAS’ MISSION AND ROME

By Steven Farron

Since antiquity the Aeneas—Dido episode has generally been recognized as the most powerful and memorable part of the Aeneid. During the past several decades there has been a considerable amount of argument as to whether it shows Aeneas’ mission in a favourable or unfavourable light. Yet this problem has not been studied systematically. It is the purpose of this article to demonstrate systematically that Vergil deliberately portrays Aeneas’ mission as brutal and destructive.

Defenders of Aeneas argue that this episode presents a conflict between passion and pietas and that Dido is a foil for Aeneas in that she makes a selfish choice, wrongly betraying her dead husband and city; whereas Aeneas makes the correct decision, choosing a lesser wrong (hurting Dido) in preference to a greater wrong (deserting Rome’s future). The trouble with this interpretation is that it is not based on the story as Vergil tells it, but on a distorted outline of the story that exists in these critics’ minds. Vergil’s narration does not focus on both Dido and Aeneas and still less on their parallel internal conflicts. It concentrates completely on Dido, her emotions, and the terrible tragedy that she undergoes as a result of her love for Aeneas. Aeneas is a shadowy, uninteresting figure, whose main importance is the effect he and his mission have on Dido. Vergil carefully keeps his feelings for Dido in the background, confining mention of them to a few suggestions and a few explicit statements. This is in sharp contrast to Aeneas’ very strong emotional attachment for Troy, that is constantly displayed in the first half of the Aeneid.

The reader’s first introduction to Dido is in Venus’ speech in 1. 340–68. It is designed to stir the reader’s interest and sympathy. But no reaction is indicated for Aeneas. In his answer, his sighing (371) is for his own past. The description of the industry and achievements of the Carthaginians (1. 421–36) also reflects very favourably on Dido. Aeneas marvels at the city (1. 421–2); but his only strong emotional reaction is at the pictures of the Trojan war (1. 459–65). When Dido enters, Vergil describes her as ‘extremely beautiful’ (forma pulcherrima, 1. 496) and then compares her in a simile to Diana and portrays her as a great queen ruling her people (1. 498–509). But Aeneas’ emotions are only for his newly found
comrades (1. 513–15). After Dido’s extremely generous speech (1. 562–78), Vergil states of Aeneas and Achates ‘their spirits were stirred by these words, (1. 579). However, the following lines (1. 580–5) show that their excitement is for the safety of their friends. Aeneas’ speech to Dido (1. 595–610) expresses extreme gratitude and praise. However, as lines 610–12 demonstrate, his emotions are still directed towards his comrades. By contrast, Vergil says of Dido, ‘she was stupefied (obstipuit) at first sight’ (1. 613).\(^1\) From then on in the rest of book 1 and throughout book 4, Dido’s passion for Aeneas is described with a brilliance and compassion that has been the cause of admiration of poets and critics for the past 2,000 years. But still no mention is made of Aeneas’ love for Dido, only his ‘paternal (patrius) love’ for Ascanius (1. 643–4).

We have to wait until 4. 332 for the first indication of Aeneas’ love for Dido. The only other explicit mention of it is in lines 360, 393–5, and 441–9. There is no indication of his love in the first half of book 4. When he is compared to the shepherd who wounds Dido, he is described as ‘unknowing’ (nescius), which is emphasized by its initial place in the line (4. 72). When Mercury first appears to him, he has no hesitation; on the contrary, ‘he burns to leave’ (4. 281). His only qualm is how to break the news to Dido (283–94). Vergil had him postpone telling Dido of his departure in order to provide more of a scope for the portrayal of Dido’s agony in all its facets. But it would have been simpler and more favourable to Aeneas to explain this delay by Aeneas’ fear that if he confronted Dido before he had made his preparations, he might be too overcome by emotion. The most likely explanation of why Vergil did not use this motivation was that he did not want to detract attention from Dido and her feelings. Certainly he had no interest in creating an impression of Aeneas undergoing an agonizing struggle.

Even after Vergil mentions Aeneas’ love for Dido, it is often forgotten. In lines 340–7 Aeneas says that if he were free of the compulsion of the fates, his first choice would be to have remained at Troy (‘this is my love’, 347). In lines 529–53 Vergil describes how Dido cannot sleep because ‘her cares increase . . . her love rages (saevit)’ (531–2) and she is afflicted with agonizing thoughts. The passage ends, ‘Such great cries of woe she kept bursting from her breast.’ The next two lines are, ‘Aeneas on the top of his ship, now certain of leaving was sleeping’. Then, after Mercury appears to Aeneas again, he is all resolution, showing not the slightest second thought at leaving (573–80). He even says, ‘we obey this order joyfully (ovantes)’ (577). In line 581 Vergil adds that the same ardor for going seizes all his men. At this juncture Vergil has
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already described the humiliation to which the once majestic queen has sunk (424-34) and her preparation of her own funeral pyre (504-21). After it, he describes her descent into nearly total insanity, punctuated by moments of lucidity (589-606) and her suicide. The last sentence of book 4 is, ‘all her warmth slipped away and her life receded into the winds’. D. Dudley, in his defence of Aeneas, points out that this sentence portrays how ‘all that passionate life has vanished into thin air . . .’ Dudley talks about its ‘extraordinary and moving force . . .’; and says ‘. . . it is Dido’s fate that abides in our minds’. Then he adds, ‘. . . but we must think of Aeneas too and what he is losing’.2 However, Vergil gives no indication that Aeneas is thinking of what he is losing. The first two lines of book 5 are, ‘Meanwhile Aeneas was already holding the middle of the sea with his fleet, certain of his journey . . .’ Lines 3-7 indicate that Aeneas shares with the other Trojans apprehension as to what Dido might do to herself, but they do not imply any regret for having had to leave her.

Aeneas meets Dido once more, in book 6. There Vergil speaks of his love for her (455). But it is described as a ‘sweet’ (dulcis) rather than a passionate love. The emphasis of the episode is not on his love for her but the harm he has caused her. When she withdraws, Aeneas weeps not for the loss he feels at losing her but out of pity for her ‘unjust fate’ (475). Vergil mentions Dido on three other occasions. In none of them does he indicate any regret on Aeneas’ part for having lost her or any feeling for her. However, they all involve a gift that she had generously given to him, and thus remind the reader how much she had loved him. This is done explicitly in 5. 571-2 where Iulus is described as riding on a horse ‘which fair Dido had given to be a reminder of herself and a pledge of her love’. Then, in 9. 266, among other valuables, Ascanius casually offers to Nisus and Euryalus ‘an ancient goblet, which Sidonian Dido gave’. Then, in 11. 72–75, Aeneas wraps around the corpse of Pallas, ‘twin tunics, stiff with gold and purple . . ., which Sidonian Dido herself, happy in her work, had made for him, weaving the web with thin gold’. The description emphasizes Dido’s lavish generosity to Aeneas. R. Austin states about the words ‘happy in her work’ (73), ‘these two words should help us to understand what Aeneas had renounced in gaining Italy’.3 As is typical of defenders of Aeneas, Austin’s statement simply has no basis in the text. Vergil neither states nor implies that Aeneas felt any regret over the loss of Dido. On the contrary, it is Dido’s love for Aeneas that is emphasized by the words ‘happy in her work’, especially since the word happy is immediately preceded by the
word ‘for him’ (illi) and by the fact that she made it with her own hands, which is stressed by the use of both the words ‘she herself’ and ‘with her own hands’ (74). So, this description, along with the other descriptions of Dido’s gifts, reminds the reader of how loving and generous Dido was. If it indicates anything about Aeneas it is how little he cares for her, since he shows no hesitation in giving it away.

The lack of conflict in Aeneas is caused not only by the fact that his passion for Dido is kept in the background, but also his feelings of obligation (pietas) are very weak. As nearly everywhere else in the first half of the Aeneid, he has nearly no interest in his fated future. It is something that has been thrust on him against his will. In book 2 Hector tells him to ‘seek out the mighty city you will establish having crossed the sea’ (294–5). But Aeneas when he wakes up wants only to die fighting at Troy (317). Later his father’s refusal to leave and his wife’s disappearance cause him again to forget completely his future mission. He leaves Troy ‘weeping’ (3. 10). When he leaves Andromache and Helenus he regards them as much more fortunate than himself because they can remain in their imitation Troy, whereas he must go to Italy (3. 493–8). In book 5 the burning of his ships causes Aeneas to consider remaining in Sicily, ‘forgetful of the fates’ (703). In book 6 his interest in seeing Anchises and learning about his future is blotted out by his fascination with Daedalus’ carved doors and his desire to converse with Deiphobus. He must be called away from both by the Sibyl with a reproach (37, 539). It is only Dido that Aeneas leaves without any initial hesitation. But his devotion to his mission is as weak in book 4 as in the rest of the first half of the Aeneid. He himself twice insists in conversations with Dido that his mission was forced on him against his will (4. 361; 6. 461–3). As for his pietas to his father and his son’s future, he mentions them in 4. 351–5; and in 4. 274–6 Mercury gives Ascanius’ future as the ultimate reason for him to leave Carthage. But neither consideration has been mentioned as troubling Aeneas before. Lines 351–3 state that Aeneas has ignored Anchises’ repeated appearances, and ‘look back’ (respice) in line 275 implies that Aeneas has lost sight of ‘hopes for Iulus’. The use of the same verb in 225 and 236 imply the same thing about his Italian future, which is not mentioned afterwards as a consideration. When Aeneas meets Dido again in 6. 461–3 the only cause for his leaving that he mentions is ‘the command of the gods’. As is usual for Aeneas in the first half of the Aeneid he must be driven forward by external intervention, but usually in books 1–6 he did not obey the gods with much alacrity.
Dido, on the other hand, really and deeply feels her obligations. Although in 1. 720–1 Vergil says that Cupid ‘began to efface Sychaeus’, she feels violent revulsion at violating his memory (4. 24–29) and deep guilt afterwards (552). She also is very concerned for the welfare of Carthage. In fact, Vergil makes clear that in choosing to indulge her love for Aeneas she did not knowingly ignore Carthage. Anna’s main argument is that a union with Aeneas will greatly strengthen Carthage (4. 39–49). It is a perfectly logical argument. The gods to whom she sacrifices also indicate that her mind is working in this direction. She does not sacrifice to Venus, but to Juno goddess of ‘marriage ties’ (59), and the first mentioned divinity is ‘law-bringing Ceres’. Then, in line 260 Vergil shows that her political hopes for her affair with Aeneas were reasonable.

Aeneas’ defence of his actions (4. 333–61) is logically correct. As Servius pointed out, it uses many rhetorical devices that are reminiscent of a controversia. Indeed, its cool, unemotional tone is the exact opposite of Dido’s burning passion. Dido’s accusations are much more powerful and also correct. She did find him a castaway and shared her kingdom with him (373–5). This argument is especially effective in view of Aeneas’ prayer in 1. 603–5, that if justice has any significance the gods should reward her. Also, because of her generosity towards him, she has made the neighbouring peoples hostile and lost her former good name (320–3). Also she was happy before he arrived (657–8). Furthermore Vergil has Dido express the reader’s own fury and exasperation at Aeneas’ calm composure (4. 365–70), a composure caused by his mission, which is so murderous to Dido. Moreover, if Vergil had meant the reader to blame Dido for her conduct, he would have presented it as something she could have altered. Instead, he describes it as unalterable from the beginning (1. 674, 712). It is true that Vergil ascribes culpa to her (4. 172). But as J. Mackail points out, ‘culpa . . . means only “fault”, or “failing”, and does not imply either criminality or moral obliquity.’ Much stronger is the condemnation of Aeneas suggested by the phrase ‘a great love . . . having been polluted (polluto)’ (5. 5–6). As R. Williams observes of polluto, ‘the word is very strong indeed, and is given added emphasis by being a “run-on” word before a pause . . . It denotes the breaking of a sacred tie, cf. III, 61 pollutum hospitium (the murder of Polydorus), VII, 467.’

One more factor draws the reader’s sympathy to Dido: her affair with Aeneas brings her nearly unmitigated misery. The simile that introduces her emphasizes how happy and active she is (1. 498–502). Indeed, her happiness is specially mentioned (1. 503). Later
(1. 685) she is called ‘extremely happy’ (laetissima). However, after that, thanks to the work of Cupid, the ‘god of misery’ (1. 719), ‘unfortunate’ (infelix) virtually becomes her epithet (1. 712, 749; 4. 68, 450, 529; 5. 3; 6. 456). Vergil never shows her happily enjoying the affair. But, as she says, she would have been ‘excessively fortunate’ (nimium felix) had she never met Aeneas (4. 657–8). R. Austin, while defending Aeneas states, ‘Dido . . . is with us always’, and, ‘it is never possible to think of him (Aeneas) as any other but the man whom Dido had loved’. He should have added, as the man whose mission destroyed Dido.

Another point that must be remembered is that Dido and Aeneas in addition to being carefully depicted human characters, are also symbols for Carthage and Rome. In 1. 4 Vergil mentions Juno’s anger and then asks the cause of her anger (8–11). It is Carthage and its hostility with Rome (12–22). Dido’s first appearance is as a ruler of Carthage (1. 507–8). This follows the description of Carthage itself. Her fate is explicitly linked with that of Carthage. When she becomes ineffectual, work on the city stops (4. 86–89). This correspondence is underscored by the use of the same word (pendet) to describe her hanging on Aeneas’ story (4. 79) and the buildings of Carthage hanging in non-completion (4. 88). Also she twice calls Aeneas her enemy (hostis, 4. 424, 549). But the most explicit linkage is that of Dido’s death with the destruction of Carthage. In 4. 682–3 Anna says that by her suicide Dido has destroyed Carthage. In 4. 669–71 Vergil says of the shrieks and wailing at Dido’s death that it was as if ‘all Carthage or ancient Tyre were falling before an inrushing enemy and furious flames were rolling through the houses and temples’. Also just as Dido was happy before Aeneas ruined her life, just so Vergil impresses on the reader how great an achievement was the building of Carthage (1. 421–36), which Vergil reminds us in 4. 669–71, will be annihilated by Aeneas’ descendants. So in describing how the pursuit of Aeneas’ mission brutally destroyed Dido, Vergil is symbolically describing the brutal destruction of Carthage by Rome. The Romans of Vergil’s time had very high ideals about what constituted a just war. I quote Stefan Weinstock, who supports his assertion with a wealth of references to primary sources:

The bellum iustum was never an aggressive war but one waged in self-defence . . . it had to be declared by a special priest the fateful . . . stressing the justice of the Roman cause . . . The Roman belief in their just war was accepted by Polybius, Panaetius and Poseidonius . . . Cicero devoted to it the third book of his State . . . In 55 B.C. Cato proposed in the Senate that Caesar should be handed over to the Germans for punishment, because of his wanton attack . . .
upon them so as to avert divine punishment for this sacrilege from all the Romans... Cato... was probably inspired by Cicero's similar attack on Piso... two months earlier.\(^{12}\)

It should be noted that Caesar attacked the Germans in this instance only after serious provocation, and Piso's attack against the Denseleti, which Cicero described as 'evil (nefarius) and cruel' (\textit{In Pis.} 84) was certainly no more unprovoked and less brutal than the Third Punic War.

Of course the Romans knew that on occasions they had violated their own standards of a just war,\(^{13}\) but the fact is that Vergil chose the emotional high point of his epic to remind them of what they themselves knew to be a major disgrace in their history. The importance of Carthage in Roman thought is known to everyone, and it is only necessary to read Sallust to see how important the Third Punic War seemed as a turning point in Roman history; and even the most biased historians had to admit that it was extremely opprobrious. Appian, a warm champion of Roman imperialism, describes in detail the cruelly cynical way the Romans caused the war despite the Carthaginians' attempts to placate them (8. 2. 74-131), and described the war as monstrous (\textit{ἀλλόκοτος}, 94).

The situation is the same with Livy. He believed that Romans were morally vastly superior to other people, his pro-Roman bias led him to historical distortions,\(^{14}\) and he shared typical Roman anti-Carthaginian prejudices (21. 4. 9). But, according to the \textit{Periocha} of book 49, he related how the Senate first decided to destroy Carthage and then forced \textit{(complerunt)} them to war by insulting conduct \textit{(indignitate rei)}. Velleius Paterculus attributed the destruction of Carthage to spite \textit{(invidia)} rather than any harm done (1. 12. 5). It is to this disgrace that Vergil turns his reader's attention symbolically through Dido and by direct reference in 4. 669-71.

It is now necessary to refute the most common defence of Aeneas' conduct at Carthage. It is often argued that the modern reader tends to side with Dido against Aeneas because of the uniquely romantic and individualistic outlook of our culture, but ancient Roman sensitivities were, to quote R. Austin in his defence of Aeneas, 'older and more austere'.\(^{15}\) My first answer to this argument is the analysis above of the Dido-Aeneas episode in which I tried to demonstrate that Vergil made Dido the centre of interest and deliberately created compassion for her, but had no interest in producing sympathy for Aeneas.

Another refutation of this defence of Aeneas is that Vergil again shows a romantic and individualistic attitude in his presentation of
the other major loving couple in the Aeneid, Nisus and Euryalus. The word amor is used three times of their relationship (5. 296, 334; 9. 182) as is the verb diligo (9. 430) which always indicates love in the Aeneid. Also Euryalus' beauty is constantly emphasized. That homosexuality was an accepted literary subject at this time is obvious from contemporary erotic poetry, including Vergil's Eclogues.

In both passages in which Nisus and Euryalus appear they violate social codes or the common good, but to Vergil the most significant aspect of their conduct is their love, which makes them admirable. In the race in book 5 Nisus purposefully trips Salius. This is clearly immoral yet Vergil states that the audience was delighted to see Euryalus win (338), and that when Salius complained, completely justifiably, that Euryalus won by cheating, the audience again favoured Euryalus (343). The description of the race ends with a reference to Nisus, the cheater, as an 'exceptional (egregius) youth' (361).

In book 9 their purpose, as defined by Nisus, is an extremely important one: 'Everyone, people and Senate, beg that men be sent [to Aeneas] to bring him sure information' (192-3). When they inform the Trojan leaders of their intention they again mention as their primary purpose 'to seek Aeneas' (241). They are led astray from this purpose by an insane lust for slaughter. Euryalus is compared to 'a hungry lion, raging through a full sheep fold' (339). This type of comparison with a savage animal is most characteristic of Turnus. Fittingly, the helmet that Euryalus takes betrays his position to Volcens. However, the love and admiration with which Vergil describes their deaths blot out these unfavourable impressions. Euryalus dies 'as when a purple flower cut by a plough falls slack dying, or poppies with weary necks bow their heads when they are heavy with rain' (435-7). Then Nisus forgets all about his mission and the needs of the Trojans as he is overcome by his love for Euryalus to seek certain death. His last act is to throw himself over Euryalus' corpse and die there.

Vergil clearly regards Nisus' death as being a sign of great nobility. He ends the episode with tremendous praise for both of them: 'Fortunate pair, if my poem has any power. No day will ever erase you from the memory of time' (446-7). So Nisus is admirable because he chose love and emotion over duty to the common good, just the opposite of Aeneas in book 4, but similar to Dido, who also died for love.

A further objection to the contention that the literary culture in Vergil's time was less romantic and individualistic than our own
is that there is simply no evidence to support it. The most distinguishing feature of Vergil's style is its empathetic and subjective nature. His contemporaries were Tibullus, Propertius, and Horace. Velleius Paterculus, certainly not a very romantic soul, when looking back on what was already the golden age of Latin literature, mentions as pre-eminent poets (2. 36. 2) Varro, Lucretius, Catullus ('Catullus second to none'), Vergil, Tibullus, and Ovid. In fact, Vergil's own tremendous reputation during his lifetime was not due to the Aeneid, which was published posthumously, but to the Eclogues and Georgics. In the former the pain of unrequited love plays a prominent part. Its last line, before the personal valediction, is 'Love conquers all, let us yield to Love' (10. 69). The Georgics contains a powerful portrayal of the overpowering force of Love (3. 242–83) and its last memorable episode is the graphic description of Orpheus' overwhelming agony at the loss of Eurydice (4. 504–27). As Richard Heinze pointed out, the literary culture of Vergil's time was saturated with 'the depiction of love as a soul-filling and soul-disturbing grief' (seelenerfüllender und seelengerstorrender Leidenschaft); and Vergil would have had an abundance of models and examples to draw on since 'the last flowering of Greek poetry was inventive in nothing more than in finding all the unfortunate wanderings of all-consuming grief... which drives its victim through sorrow, shame and desperation to suicide'. Similarly, Robert Conway has pointed out that 'Vergil definitely places Dido in the company of deserted heroines, like Ariadne, for whom the first desire of any poet who told their story was to move the reader's pity'. Also in the visual arts, there are the large number of representations of famous mythological female lovers among the paintings found at Pompeii. Indeed, parts of Catullus' description of Ariadne seem nearly certainly to be modelled on a painting.

The ancient Romans' fascination with love, especially the agonies of love, is a manifestation of their generally very compassionate and extremely lachrymose nature. For the sake of brevity I shall confine my illustrations of this characteristic to its effect on legal trials. I think that the first evidence of this comes from Terence's Phormio (275–7) where Phaedria mentions the partiality often (saepe) shown by judges for poor defendants on account of pity (misericordia). To move to Vergil's lifetime, Cicero remarks in his De Oratore (2. 195) that judges are very moved at the sight of a sad and squalid old man. For this reason in his attack on Verres (2. 5. 128) he draws the judges' attention to the poor, wretched condition of the allies. Similarly in his defences of
Cluentius (18, 192) and Murena (86) Cicero dwells on their poverty and wretchedness. Most striking is that he ends his plea for Murena by concentrating completely on how miserable his condition will be if he is deprived of the consulate. Cicero obviously thought that this would be more persuasive with the judges than pointing out the tremendous danger to the Republic that Murena's loss of the consulate would entail.  

Cicero's defence of Murena also illustrates a related and very relevant aspect of ancient Roman society, that it was regarded as proper that individual motivations should determine a person's public acts, even in situations of great importance. So Julius Caesar in his Gallic War (1. 12. 7), which is meant as public propaganda, states that in fighting the Tigurini 'Caesar was not only avenging public but private injuries, because the Tigurini had slain L. Piso, the grandfather of . . . Caesar's father-in-law'. In the Gallic War Caesar often links his own cause with that of Rome.  

Similarly in the Civil War he says that he entered Italy 'to defend himself from the insults of his personal enemies (inimici) (1. 22. 5). Indeed, he mentions his personal enemies on eight other occasions in the first book of the Civil War.  

Even the younger Cato, that paragon of unshakable devotion to the Republic, openly put private considerations before the public good on occasion. For instance, because of the flagrant bribery involved in the consular elections of 63 B.C. Cato stated in a public speech that he would bring charges against the winners, whoever they would be, except for Decimus Silanus because he was his brother-in-law. Earlier in his career he had defended another brother-in-law, Lucullus, against Gaius Memmius' charges primarily because of their relationship and only secondarily because he thought the affair was harmful to the state.  

My last argument against the assertion that our sympathy for Dido is caused by our unique cultural sensitivities is that all evidence points to the opposite direction: that from antiquity on the focus of interest and sympathy was on Dido and her suffering. The reference to Dido closest in time to Vergil is Ovid's Heroides 7, which is strongly influenced by the Aeneid. It presents the situation completely from Dido's point of view. Of course, it was natural for Ovid to portray this episode in such a manner. But the significant point is that he considered it to be appropriate material for his type of approach. Later in his Tristia (2. 535-6) he refers to the Aeneas—Dido affair as the most popular part of the Aeneid. Likewise Lucian in The Dance (46) mentions the subject of the Aeneid as 'the wanderings of Aeneas and Dido's love'. St. Augustine
in his *Confessions* twice mentions weeping for Dido as something that he was taught to do while receiving a traditional, classical education (1. 13). He was to weep for her ‘because she killed herself for love’ and for her death because ‘it came about through loving Aeneas’. The strongest indication of how the ancients read the Aeneas—Dido affair is provided by Macrobius (5. 17. 5-6):

The story of Dido in love... *through so many ages (tot per saecula)*... flies through the attention of everyone to such an extent that painters, sculptors, and embroiderers use this subject as if there were no other, nor less is it celebrated by the never-ending gesticulations and songs of actors... So powerful has been the beauty of the narrative that everyone is aware of the chastity of the Carthaginian queen and that she committed suicide in order not to endure dishonour... they would prefer to celebrate... what the sweetness of poetic composition has poured into human hearts.

This pro-Dido attitude has been constant in all subsequent periods of European history, despite the vast changes that have occurred. For, as Heinze observed, ‘Dido is the only character created by a Roman poet who was to pass on into world literature.’28 Similarly George Gordon noted, ‘the story of Dido has haunted the imagination of Europe, drawing tears from saints and sinners, from... the fourth century... (to) the twentieth century’.29 He also points out that Aeneas by contrast has been relegated to relative oblivion. Indeed, as W. Sellar observed, ‘at no time has the character of Aeneas excited any strong human interest. No later poet or moralist set it up... as a subject of ethical contemplation.’30

For example, Chaucer, in his *Legend of Good Women*, which shows a close knowledge of *Aeneid* 1 and 4, describes Dido as a ‘saint of Cupid’ but Aeneas as a ‘fals lover and traitour’. In general, ‘the sympathies of the Middle Ages had been chiefly with the deserted Dido.’31 Later, ‘Renaissance playwrights of various nationalities’ wrote tragedies which ‘bear Dido’s name as title and present her fate... To most of these writers Aeneas is a shadowy figure, and by implication a villain, the more detestable for his *pietas*.’32 The most famous English play of this type is Marlowe’s *Dido, Queen of Carthage* where Dido begins her last speech (5. 1. 292–4) with a prediction that is obviously based on the prevalent attitude among Marlowe’s contemporaries: ‘Now, Dido, with these relics burn thyself,/ And make Aeneas famous through the world/ For perjury and slaughter of a queen.’ Certainly it is difficult to imagine a person who was less romantic in nature than Dr. Johnson. Boswell in the Advertisement to the second edition of his biography described him as an ‘animated’ champion of ‘religion, morality, loyalty and subordination’. Johnson attacked writers who made
love their subject since ‘it has no great influence upon the sum of
life’. Yet, Boswell quotes him (Aetat. 74) as assuming that
Dido was wronged by Aeneas and using that as an illustration of
Roman partiality: ‘they have told their story without shame or
regard to equitable treatment of their injured enemy; they had no
compunction, no feeling for a Carthaginian. Why, Sir, they would
never have borne Virgil’s description of Aeneas’ treatment of Dido,
if she had not been a Carthaginian.’ In the nineteenth century
Landor, who of all the literary men of his time was the most
devoted to Greek and, especially, Latin classics, and who was gen-
erally very critical of the Romantic Movement, wrote that in
neither Catullus, Lucretius, nor Homer ‘is there anything so im-
passioned, and therefore, so sublime as the last hours of Dido in
the Aeneid . . . omitting . . . those [verses] which drop like icicles
from the rigid lips of Aeneas . . . In this place Virgil fought his
battle of Actium, which left him poetical supremacy in the Roman
world.’ Thus, the pro-Dido attitude, far from being a reaction
conditioned by the peculiar sensitivities of our culture, has been
the common one for 2,000 years.

Also significant is that those who in the past have defended
Aeneas’ conduct, used arguments that contemporary apologists
would find weak and unacceptable. If there were strong arguments
on Aeneas’ side then Dryden should have been able to discover
them. He was the poet laureate of Charles II and James II, a high
Tory and convert to Roman Catholicism. Furthermore, the out-
look of his criticism should have made him favourable to Aeneas.
In his Dedication to the second volume of his translation of
Vergil’s works, he states, ‘The design of it [an epic poem] is to
form the mind to heroic virtue by example’ (p. 3). So he believed
that the Iliad was probably written at the time of the Persian War
and that its purpose ‘was to urge the necessity . . . of good under-
standing betwixt confederate states . . . also of discipline in an
army to . . . the supreme command’ (p. 18). Yet he admits that
Aeneas’ conduct is extremely difficult to defend, but argues that
his piety obliged him to ‘search an asylum for his gods in Italy’
(pp. 42-3). However, this is not mentioned as a consideration in
Aeneid 4. Dryden’s other main argument, of which he says, ‘if I
cannot clear the hero I hope at least to bring off the poet’ (p. 44),
is that ‘Vergil . . . thought himself engaged . . . to espouse the
cause . . . of his country against Carthage . . . he knew the Romans
were to be his readers, and them he bribed, perhaps at the expense
of the hero’s honesty . . . as pleading before corrupt judges’ (p. 47).
However, if Vergil’s purpose were to espouse the Roman cause,
then why did he make Dido so much more sympathetic than Aeneas? Dryden also exclaims about Mercury, 'Oh, how convenient is a Machine sometimes in an heroic poem! . . . Vergil was constrained to use it here, or the honesty of the hero would be ill-defended' (p. 44). But to Dryden the great glory of the Dido-Aeneas episode was that it was 'wherein the whole passion of Love is more exactly described than in any other poet. Love was the theme of the fourth book' (p. 45). Obviously the love is Dido's.

NOTES

1. As Arthur Pease (P. Vergilii Maronis, Aeneidos, Liber Quartus, 1935; Darmstadt, 1967, p. 84) explaining iamdudum in 4. 1, 'in 1, 613 the word obstipuit may suggest a sudden but deep initial impression'.
4. As to this question of the status of their affair, it must be remembered that 'Roman law in Vergil's day did not draw the sharp line we draw between people who are respectably married and people who are not. The old religious marriage had yielded much ground to marriage by common consent. In such a relationship the parties might regard themselves as entering on marriage from the outset' (Kenneth Quinn, Latin Explorations (London, 1963), p. 38).
6. P. Vergilii Maronis, Aeneidos, Liber Quintus (Oxford, 1960), pp. 36-7. But there is no proof for his assertion that it refers only to the Trojans' thoughts about Dido's attitude.
8. Since the primary meaning of infelix is unlucky, it reinforces the portrayal of Dido as a victim. Infelix is applied to many characters in the Aeneid. 'It constantly expresses the poet's own sympathies' (Pease, n. 1 above, p. 145). Dido is also described as miserable (misera) in 4. 315, 420, 429, 697; extremely miserable (miserrima) in 4. 117 and 'destined to die' (moritura) in 4. 308, 415, 519, 604.
10. In 6. 851, which is arguably the highpoint of the entire epic, Anchises addresses Aeneas as tu Romane (i.e. the archetypal Roman). For an excellent, concise discussion of the nature of literary symbolism, see Poschl, n. 7 above, pp. 21-2. J. Perret (Virgile (Paris, 1965), pp. 107-8) asserts 'the Carthaginian episode does not symbolize only the Punic Wars, of which it is the immediate prefiguration . . . it represents the entire category of ordeals . . . in which the Roman destiny triumphed . . .' As for the view that Dido represented Cleopatra, I have not dealt with it since I can see absolutely no evidence for it in the text.
11. Contra in 1. 13 is, of course, political as well as symbolic.
13. A good example of awareness of such violations, and censure of them, is Livy, 42. 47.
15. Note 3 above, p. xiii.
16. 5. 295, 344; 9. 179, 433.
17. Poschl, n. 7 above, pp. 98-9.
19. As attested by Tacitus, Dialogus 13. 2.
20. The Aristaeus frame, which ends Georgic 4, is narrated in a bland, objective manner, very different from the elliptical, emphatic, sympathetic style of the Orpheus—Eurydice story (Otis, n. 18 above, pp. 194–212).


23. It should not be surprising that such sentimentality should coexist with the brutalities of Roman slavery and the gladiatorial shows. Such a combination of extreme sentimentality and brutality is not uncommon.

24. 1. 20. 5; 35. 4; 4. 16. 3; 17. 1.

25. 2. 8; 4. 4 (twice); 7. 1; 8. 3; 9. 2; 32. 3; 33. 3.


27. Ibid. 29. 3. Also interesting is the overriding importance attributed by Cicero and his correspondents to his personal obligations (officium amici) to Pompey in determining the course he follows in the civil war (Ad. Att. 7. 12. 3; 9. 1. 4; 5. 3; 7A. 2; 7B.1; 10. 2).

28. Note 18 above, p. 133.


34. p. 1037 in Modern Library Edition.

35. Foreign Quarterly Review, 1842.

36. The pagination is from the edition of 1763.