**Aeneid, Books 1–3**

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Citation details: HOPKINS, Amanda, ‘_Aeneid, Books 1–3._’ Version of a lecture given on the Epic Tradition module (Coventry: The University of Warwick, 9 January, 2014) <web address> [accessed DATE]¹

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**Prefatory Note on _Aeneid_ Texts Cited**

Textual citations are primarily based on the translation of the _Aeneid_ by Robert Fitzgerald; references from this work show the relevant book numbers in Arabic script. References to the Latin text are distinguished by the use of Roman numerals for the book numbers.

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**Part I: The Background to the Aeneid**

**Virgil and Homer**

More than five hundred years divide the Homeric epics from Virgil’s _Aeneid_. This half-century contains many important historical events, some of which Virgil addresses in the poem. By this time, writing had evolved into everyday usage among the educated, so that the tradition of oral composition of poetry had given way to works written by individuals, although myths and legends of the past were still popular subject matter.

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¹ Replace <web address> with the location from which the file was accessed, and DATE with the full date it was accessed. To cite notes taken during the lecture, rather than this version:  

Publius Vergilius Maro, commonly known as Virgil, was born in 70 BC and died in 19 BC. Although later Romans compiled a biography of Virgil, much of it seems to be romanticized and little factual information is available about his earlier life. He is thought by modern historians to have been born in a village near Mantua into a family wealthy enough to have him well-educated. His earlier works are set in the countryside: the *Eclogues* are ten bucolic idylls, poems on pastoral life and love, and the *Georgics* is a didactic work on farming, with sections on crops, trees, livestock and bees; the poem’s title has Greek roots and means ‘On Working the Earth’.

In 29 BC, Virgil began work on the *Aeneid*, which presents Trojan Aeneas as the first founder of Rome. He chooses verse epic as the vehicle for this great work; and, in doing so, makes it plain that he is engaging consciously with both the Homeric material and form.

Examining Virgil’s poem against Homer’s shows clearly which aspects the later poet deemed ‘epic’: and the *Aeneid* contains episodes, characters, themes, and poetic techniques that reflect material from the Greek poems, reformulated for the first-century Roman audience. Kenneth Quinn points out that the *Aeneid*

expressly recalls Homer’s story and constantly evokes Homer’s conventions – the parallels are close and sustained in some books. There are the small things: scenes, similes, numberless details of phrase, not merely influenced by Homer but modelled closely on him. […] Finally, the structure of the poem is Homeric: the divine machinery, the rules Virgil imposes on himself for what may be said and what left unsaid follow Homeric practice. Yet, for all this, Virgil’s poem remains consciously, fundamentally, and unmistakably, Roman.

Virgil leaves the audience no room to doubt that he is deliberately interacting with the Homeric

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poems, but he is a Roman, which means that, as well as drawing on Homeric material, he adapts or critiques Homer as he sees fit.

**THE AENEID AND ROMAN HISTORY**

Virgil adopts in the *Aeneid* a new technique developed from Homer’s prolepsis. In the *Iliad*, Homer often looks forward a short way into the future of his characters and of Troy, evoking events that would happen after the story of Achilleus’s anger was concluded; the fall of Troy and the death of Achilleus are two key examples. The *Odyssey* looks beyond the end of his story of *nostos*: Tiresias tells Odysseus he must appease Poseidon by setting out on a new journey after he has successfully restored order on Ithaka. Virgil includes prolepses, but extends them significantly in two ways – in the amount of time involved and in the level of detail included – in order to be able to incorporate specific events and figures of recent Roman history into his story of Rome’s foundation, thus inaugurating future histories as an element of epic tradition.

The first of these future histories occurs early in Book 1 and bears a rather complicated relationship to prophecy, to which future histories are, of course, closely connected. Here, Jupiter reassures Venus that her son will reach Italy and found Rome. This is a long speech (1. 347–398), taking in several key episodes of Roman history: it moves from Aeneas’s present predicament to culminate in references to ‘The Trojan Caesar’ (1. 385), Julius, whose name, Jupiter states, is derived from the alternative name of Aeneas’s son, Iulus (1. 387); this is not Julius Caesar, but his adopted son, Caius Julius Caesar Octavianus (Octavian), later called Augustus, who closed the Gates of War (1. 394–98).

This is probably a good moment to review some Roman history. A good deal had happened since the founding of Rome, real life supplemented by myths and legends, some of which are also deployed by Virgil. Here are some key historical events:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE (BC)</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>c.1300–1000</td>
<td>Fall of Troy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.1000</td>
<td>Latins settle in Latium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.815</td>
<td>Foundation of Carthage by Tyrians</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 625</td>
<td>Founding of Rome</td>
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<tr>
<td>509</td>
<td>Roman Republic founded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>508</td>
<td>Political reform in Athens, move toward democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>496</td>
<td>Romans defeat Latins at Lake Regillus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>322</td>
<td>Alexander of Macedon completes conquest of Greece; end of Athenian democracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For Virgil’s contemporaries, the most important event is the end of war: Virgil is writing during the Pax Augusta, the peace brought about and maintained by Augustus after many years of civil war. The Aeneid, of course, addresses war from its first line, Arma virumque cano (arms and the man I sing), rendered by Fitzgerald as ‘I sing of warfare and a man at war’. The poem will not, however, be a paean to battles and heroes: war in the Aeneid is not a glorious enterprise, but an evil necessity; and by drawing unmissable parallels between Aeneas’s story and recent Roman history, by using the future histories to describe key events from Rome’s history, Virgil is able to manipulate his audience’s emotions and offer a commentary on his own time. The effect on Rome of civil war, and the Romans’ hatred and fear of it, is suggested earlier in Book 1, through a simile:

When rioting breaks out in a great city,  
And the rampaging rabble goes so far  
That stones fly, and incendiary brands –  
For anger can supply that kind of weapon –  
If it so happens they look round and see  
Some dedicated public man, a veteran  
Whose record gives him weight, they quiet down,  
Willing to stop and listen.  
Then he prevails in speech over their fury  
By his authority, and placates them.  

(1. 201–210)
This passage is given additional significance by being the poem’s first epic simile; and it is an unusual parallel: a riot caused by human agency stilled by a valued, virtuous man, who can influence the rioters because of his own authority, and, in the same way, Neptune stills a storm at sea; and in each case terrifying chaos and destruction give way to peace. The simile is surely intended to echo the realities of Roman history: the great city is Rome, the rioters are the participants in the civil war, the ‘dedicated public man’ is Augustus himself. The simile thus highlights the *Aeneid* as a celebration of peace and thus of the newly-peaceful Rome, and thus of the *Pax Augustus* and its perpetrator.

*Aeneid* 1–3 and the Homeric epics

**THE SUBJECT AND THE CHIEF PROTAGONIST**

From the outset, it is apparent that Virgil is engaging directly with Homer’s epics. The prologue begins by articulating the poem’s subject and guiding principle, and then provides some context, explaining the narrative’s overall direction and immediate situation, a passage that includes an invocation, ‘Tell me the causes now, O Muse’ (1. 13). The prologue concluded, the narrative begins – *in medias res*, with Aeneas already seven years (1. 1030) into his journey away from Troy and towards a future that is as yet not entirely clear to him. Books 2 and 3 are Aeneas’s story of the fall of Troy and his subsequent wanderings, echoing most obviously Odysseus recounting the Great Wanderings to the Phaiakians, but with a much more serious tone: Aeneas tells his tale from the perspective of the losing side, and his tale is filled with tragedy and horror. Hector appears to Aeneas in a dream – another motif familiar from the Homeric poems – to tell him specifically not to arm himself and not to fight; but, once he fully appreciates that the Greeks are inside Troy, Aeneas *does* arm himself and *does* fight, although this is not entirely for *kleos*, the winning of glory, but a desperate and last-ditch attempt to save the city. He has to be told again, this time by his mother, Venus, that he should be prioritizing his family now that Troy is irrevocably lost. Aeneas is presented here as youthful and hot-headed, a Homeric-style hero; in the *Aeneid*, Virgil must mould Aeneas into a chief protagonist more suitable for a text that treats war as an evil necessity and celebrates peace; Aeneas must be shown to be both brave and a sound warrior, but he must somehow become a new kind of hero: one who fights only when alternatives have been explored and attempted.

This suggests that Virgil will present something that Homer did not: a hero who develops, grows, learns from experience. This is not to say that Homer’s characters are unable to develop,
nor that Homer was too unsophisticated to show development in his characters; but it is the case
that Homer’s chief protagonists, and other characters, tend to arrive ready-formed with the
character traits they will need in the context of the poem’s plot and the time-period it covers.
Achilleus is an expert warrior, fated to die young, although he does not know exactly when; thus
he is driven most of all by the need to maintain full kleos and timē at all times. This does not
mean he has no other feelings – his eleos is apparent on several occasions – nor that he is not
mindful of important aspects of Greek society, such as xenia. Indeed, knowing that his end will
come soon, he thinks about life and death, hence his self-questioning about the relative value of
a unsung long life and a short life with lengthy postmortem fame. The Underworld scene in the
Odyssey has him engage with the same conundrum, one moment expressing his hatred of his grey
and ghostly existence, the next asking whether his son has gone on to win his own reputation.3
Although occasionally subject to unfortunate or hubristic lapses (a Homeric hero is not perfect),
Odysseus is marked by intelligence and motivated by nostos. Because they both travel by sea for
many years, Odysseus offers a close parallel to Aeneas; but he does not need to grow in stature
or experience since his successful homecoming will require exactly the same qualities – cunning
and fighting skills – that he already possesses and possessed in the Iliad. (His cunning, of course,
is condemned by Virgil on several occasions.) Both the Homeric chief protagonists show that
sorrow and fear are not inappropriate to an epic hero; and this aspect Virgil borrows from Homer,
having Aeneas describe his fear in Troy to his Carthaginian hosts.

Aeneas, conversely, will need to grow in both stature and experience: his future involves the
foundation of Rome herself; he is responsible for the whole of Roman history down to Emperor
Augustus and beyond. Virgil offers a symbol of this – redoubled in the text – in describing
Aeneas leaving Troy:

‘Then come, dear father. Arms around my neck:
I’ll take you on my shoulders, no great weight.
Whatever happens, both will face one danger,
Find one safety. Iulus will come with me,
My wife at a good interval behind. […]’
When I had said this, over my breadth of shoulder
And bent neck, I spread out a lion skin
For tawny cloak and stooped to take his weight.
The little Iulus put his hand in mine
And came with shorter steps beside his father.
My wife fell in behind.

(2. 921–25, 936–42)

3 Where Odysseus has fine things to report of him (11. 506–37), Virgil depicts Pyrrhus sacrilegiously killing Priam
(23. 660–727); and Priam denounces Pyrrhus in terms that directly evoke the Homeric motif of father/son comparison:
‘That great Achilles | You claim to be the son of – and you lie – | Was not like you to Priam, his enemy’ (3. 701–803).
This passage raises some key points. One arises from the lion-skin that Aeneas uses as a cloak. This suggests a parallel between Aeneas and Hercules, a parallel which has resonance in the poem in various ways. As M. Owen Lee observes: ‘Just as the labors of Hercules were the glory of Hera (that is what the Greek name Heracles means), so the labors, the buffetings and sufferings, of Aeneas will be the glory of the vindictive Juno’. W. A. Camps further explains that ‘The figure of Hercules of legend, afflicted by the enmity of Juno and oppressed by long and arduous labours, is no doubt reflected in some aspects of the person of Aeneas’; like Aeneas, Heracles sometimes stands as a symbol for Augustus. There was a Roman cult of Hercules, which is evoked in later books of the Aeneid, and there are numerous references to Hercules in the text, such as in Anchises’s pessimistic speech: ‘I call it | More than enough that once before I saw my city taken and wrecked, and went on living’ (2. 836–38). Troy had been destroyed by Hercules, who had rescued Hesione, the daughter of Laomedon, Priam’s father; Laomedon, already in trouble with Apollo and Poseidon for not paying his debts to them ob4see Iliad 21. 443–60), failed to reward the hero.

Augustus may have had a key role in the poem’s composition: the late fourth-century and early fifth-century grammarian Servius wrote commentaries on Virgil’s works, and stated that it was Augustus who suggested to Virgil that he compose an epic on Aeneas and the founding of Rome. As Niall Rudd points out, ‘Since the Julian family claimed descent from Aeneas, Augustus presumably expected a poem which would glorify him as the culmination of the Aeneas legend’; since Aeneas was Venus’s son, this would show Augustus as descended from Jupiter himself. The additional parallel between Hercules and Augustus strengthens this, since Hercules was also Jupiter’s son.

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The passage also articulates the father/son theme familiar from Homeric epic and, in doing so, it also clearly prioritizes masculine over feminine. This is, in fact, a potent symbol of Roman-ness: the man in his prime, a link in a male chain, looking after his father and his son. The inferiority of mortal women is expressed through the figure of Creusa, walking, at her husband’s behest, behind the primary group made up of her husband, father-in-law and son. Unsurprisingly, in the chaos of the burning city, filled with fighting Greeks and desperate Trojans, she becomes separated from Aeneas. When he (eventually) realizes, he goes back home, thinking she might be there. What he finds is his wife’s ghost. Virgil exploits this episode to explain her loss to be a matter of political and narrative necessity: a son might be acceptable, but Aeneas needs to be unencumbered by a wife, and thus eligible to make a new marriage, when he reaches Italy. Women, the text will demonstrate, are both hugely problematic and eminently expendable.

The description of Aeneas leaving the city is the start of his journey: he must convey the remnants of Troy – people and gods – to the place where they are supposed to settle. Why Aeneas? Partly in response to his survival in Homer. In Book 20 of the *Iliad*, Aineias challenges Achilleus and, as they are fighting, Poseidon says to Hera:

> ‘But why does this man, who is guiltless, suffer his sorrows for no reason, for the sake of others’ unhappiness, and always he gives gifts that please them to the gods who hold the wide heaven [?] But come, let us ourselves get him away from death, for fear the son of Kronos may be angered if now Achilleus kills this man. It is destined that he shall be the survivor, that the generation of Dardanos shall not die, without seed obliterated, since Dardanos was dearest to Kronides of all his sons that have been born to him from mortal women. For Kronos’ son has cursed the generation of Priam, and now the might of Aineias shall be lord over the Trojans, and his sons’ sons, and those who are born of their seed hereafter.’ (20.297–308)

It is Homer who establishes that Aineias is meant to survive and to be the father of rulers over the descendants of Trojan survivors. Ken Gransden (p. 25) describes the subsequent development of the legend:

> This prophecy makes Aeneas unique among the Trojan heroes: not only will he survive the fall of Troy but he will have a special and important future. An entire tradition developed about him: […] after much wandering about the Mediterranean world [he] reached Hesperia (Italy, land of the west) where he settled in Latium, the modern Lazio, the region north of Rome. This story was recorded by the Greek historian Hellanicus (5th century BC) and developed by later writers, both Greek and Roman. Aeneas was chronologically too early to replace Romulus as the founder of Rome, for this traditionally occurred in 751 BC while the fall of Troy is usually placed around

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7 Aeneas attempts three times to embrace her, an echo of the use of threes to signify great effort and/or great emotion in Homeric epic: this connects this episode directly to Odysseus’s attempt to embrace his mother in the Underworld (*Odyssey* 11. 204–22).

8 Amanda Hopkins, *Aeneid*, Books 1–3
As George Howe comments, it takes time for Aeneas to mature into his role as leader: the poem’s earliest chronological ‘picture of the hero [i.e., in Troy] is simply one of a fearless patriotic soldier caught in a desperate situation. There are no real marks of leadership upon him; he is uncertain and aimless in his actions and is subject to the uncontrolled rage of despair’; yet, as the man chosen to convey the surviving Trojans out of the city to find somewhere to found a new Troy, he has to acquire leadership skills quickly. The poem’s first view of Aeneas is perhaps unpromising, with ‘his knees | […] numb and slack’ (1. 131–32), fearing an ignominious death at sea, regretting his failure to die on the battlefield; but when his ship makes landfall, he comforts his followers, reminding them that they are destined to reach Italy and that they have survived worse ordeals before: ‘Burdened and sick at heart, | He feigned hope in his look, and inwardly | Contained his anguish’ (1. 284–86). Here, then, he displays the true role of a leader.

Aeneas’s father, Anchises, is too old to take on the role of leader, although he can still offer advice and the benefit of his experience. When Anchises dies during the journey, Aeneas must be ready and fully able to take on the mantle of pater familias, the father of the family – and this family does not simply comprise his own son, but the shiploads of Trojan followers – men, women, children – who are proto-Romans. This idea of caring government, the ruler as father, is emphasized through the term pater Aeneas (Father Aeneas), which Virgil deploys from the first book of the poem (1. 588, 955). This title had a political resonance too: since 386 BC, Rome had honoured certain of its sons with the title pater patriae (Father of the Fatherland); in 45 BC the title had been conferred on Julius Caesar and, as Gary B. Miles observes, ‘[a]lthough Augustus refused to accept the title pater patriae officially until 2 BCE, he was so honoured in poetry at least by 23 BCE’. Virgil had died in 19 BC, without finishing his epic poem; but Augustus may well have been viewed as father of the Romans before this. As Diane Favro observes, ‘[a]fter the example of [Julius] Caesar, he was especially concerned with the popular perception of his role. Gradually Augustus expanded upon the paternal associations of Caesar and himself assumed a paternal position in relationship to the city’.

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9 In the Latin text, I. 580 and 699.
SOME EPIC THEMES AND MOTIFS OF THE AENEID

Below are a few of the many elements in this part of the poem that Virgil either draws from Homer – with or with development and/or alteration – and thus identifies as key to epic in his own judgement, or adds to the epic tradition.

a) the use of prophecy, signs and omens

Messages from the gods, and the interpretation of these, feature in epic from the first book of the Iliad, where Apollo’s plague needs to be explained. The Homeric texts include prophecies, bird omens, and various other signs; and Virgil wastes little time in bringing divine messages to the forefront of his text. Book 1 includes Jupiter’s proleptical speech (1. 347–98), while the disguised Venus refers to being taught augury, and interprets bird omens (1. 539–51), and Aeneas comforts his people by reminding them that it has been foretold that they are destined to find a new home (1. 280–82). Book 3 includes a variety of prophecies, and Helenus’s vision of the future includes details of signs that Aeneas should watch for, such as the giant white sow suckling thirty piglets (3. 527–32), which he sacrifices in honour of Juno (8. 110–17).

To have any effect and value, divine messages in epic must be seen to be fulfilled: that is the point of the episode of the Greeks’ failure to dedicate their protective wall in Iliad 7 (433–63); Homer shows Zeus promising Poseidon that the gods can destroy the wall later, and then, in the lengthy proleptical passage at the beginning of Book 12 (1–35), Homer shows the destruction of
the wall after the fall of Troy. It is clear that Virgil considers these divine messages a vital part of epic tradition, and the *Aeneid* contains numerous omens and prophecies – often reinforced through duplication – that are fulfilled. In particular, Virgil develops how Homer uses prophecies to foretell Odysseus’s *nostos* in the *Odyssey* in order to consolidate Aeneas’s role as founder of Rome. Showing the fulfilment of prophecies in the poem’s plot strengthens the prophecies and future histories that present Augustus as the culmination of Aeneas’s role, and thus validate Augustus’s position as Rome’s dictator.

Prophecies have a strong connection with the idea of fate and destiny, and promised future events are often expressed in these terms. Thus the prologue states that the Trojans ‘wandered as their destiny drove them on’ (1. 47), and Aeneas says to his followers: “We hold our course for Latium, where the Fates Hold out a settlement and rest for us. Troy’s kingdom there shall rise again” (1. 280–82). The relation between fate and destiny and the Fates – *Parcae* in Latin – on the one hand and the gods’ power on the other is sometimes blurred or overlapping, as it is in Homer. In Jupiter’s speech to Venus, however, the future of Aeneas and Rome has been divinely ordained: this is not accidental nor incidental, but part of a great plan.

b) *furor* and *pietas*

The Homeric themes of war and homecoming are present in the *Aeneid*. Aeneas recounts the fall of Troy in Book 2 and his own journeying in search of a new home in Book 3; there will be more voyages and more fighting later in the poem. Other Homeric elements feature too: hospitality remains vital, for instance, and motifs such as a hero’s recognition of a god are also deployed. The idea of the hero has already changed somewhat between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; throughout the *Aeneid*, Virgil will develop the concept further to suit the sensibilities of his own time, increasingly denigrating individuality and the personal motivation of *kleos* in favour of an appreciation of communal needs.

As well as these alterations to familiar epic foci, Virgil brings two new elements into play: *furor* and *pietas*. *Furor* (adjective *furens*) relates to madness, frenzy, insanity, burning anger, uncontrollable martial rage; being related to chaos of mind and emotion, it also drives passionate love. It is connected in the poem with any kind of desire represented not by careful thought and with a view to communal good, but by suffering, burning. For Romans finally at peace after so many years of war, *furor* is something to dread: it represents the chaos brought about by

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12 Fitzgerald generally offers a modern term appropriate to the context, so it is not always easy to determine where *furor* occurs in the poem, though it is apparent where the concept is deployed. When Virgil uses the term it is used as a personification, Fitzgerald also treats it as a proper noun.
irrationality and the desire for individual gain. *Furor* drives Juno to attempt to delay Aeneas’s fated success in founding Rome. *Furor* makes the rioters arm themselves in the simile discussed earlier (1. 201–210), and causes Dido’s brother to kill her husband. It is *furor* that characterizes Aeneas’s unthinking disobedience of Hector’s order not to fight, his immediate impulse to win personal glory: ‘So fury drove me, and it came to me | That meeting death was beautiful in arms’ (2. 425–26). This clearly connects *kleos* – the winning of individual glory – with *furor*. In English, the avenging deities who pursue Orestes after he avenges his father’s death, and who will be deployed by Juno later in the *Aeneid*, are known as Furies; thus they are etymologically related – in Modern English, but not in Latin – to *furor*. (The Romans called them *Dirae*.)

*Pietas* (adjective *pius*) is not the direct opposite of *furor*, and yet it comes in the poem to represent the opposing force, the order to *furor*’s chaos. *Pietas* and *pius* are difficult to express clearly in Modern English, since it seems that, in Virgil, they resonate with more nuances than can be expressed by the words ‘piety’ and ‘pious’. These Modern English words have several distinct meanings, and thus are ambiguous: they can relate to sympathy, to religious reverence, or to being faithful to the duties owed to relatives and superiors; ‘pious’ can also be used negatively to convey the sense of unrealistic hope or sanctimoniousness. For Virgil, *pietas* and *pius* are unequivocally positive terms; and Fitzgerald renders them a variety of ways, according to context. Perhaps the most useful way to think of the concept is as Aeneas uses it in first describing himself – “‘I am Aeneas, duty-bound’” (1. 519) – since ‘duty-bound’ seems to imply both being motivated by and tied to duty. The term *pius* comes to be linked to Aeneas as ‘swift-footed’ is to Achilleus and ‘resourceful’ is to Odysseus: yet it carries greater weight than a simple epithet or a metrical filler. The term *pius* is an expression of the core quality required in a good Roman citizen, and *pius Aeneas* is its role model.

As in modern English, there’s a negative form of *pius*: *impius*, a term often applied to figures driven by *furor*. In Jupiter’s description of the closing of the Gates of War in Book 1, he refers to the imprisonment of *Furor impius* (I. 294), which Fitzgerald renders as ‘unholy Furor’ (I. 394).

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13 In the Latin: *furor iraque mentem praecipitat, pulchrumque mori succurrit in armis* (II. 315–16: frenzy and anger throw my understanding headlong, and it comes to me that it is beautiful to die in arms).
15 ‘*Sum pius Aeneas*’ (I. 378).
c) femininity

Although Aeneas is connected with *furor* in his description of his impulse to fight at Troy, he is soon seen to have grown in maturity and authority, to act with consideration and an eye to the needs of his people, even if he still sometimes makes mistakes. In fact, Virgil relates *furor* most strongly to femininity or, sometimes, to males who, like women, are unable to subdue their passions. Juno’s anger and Dido’s sexual passion, increasing from Book 1 to a climax in Book 4, will later be supplemented by other uncontrollable females, and by the destructive influence of Allecto, the Fury who intervenes in human affairs on behalf of Juno.

As in Homer, women will be the catalysts of many of the key events in the *Aeneid*. For Virgil, women are deserving of praise only when self-effacing or self-sacrificing. As mentioned above, women in Virgil’s Rome were considered dangerous if ungoverned; and this is a message he emphasizes frequently in the *Aeneid*. Obedient women, domestic women, silent women: these are true Roman women, and they are – by definition – less of a focus in the poem than those who reflect Juno by meddling in matters of public import, or those who abandon themselves to venusian passion. The mural at Carthage – an *ekphrasis* – depicts the queen of the Amazons, fighting women who live apart from men; she, ‘Fiery’ for Fitzgerald (1. 969), is in the Latin *Pentesilea furens*, driven by *furor* (I. 491), an outlandish creature behaving in a way that is inappropriate to her sex. That women’s sexual power is dangerous is exemplified by Helen; although Aeneas reports that Venus states Helen to be blameless (2. 790–94), he has already condemned her at length in his narrative, the cause of destruction to Greek and Trojan alike (2. 741–772). Dido, infected with *furor* by Venus, will demonstrate that women are not capable of ruling, a message that will be reinforced later in the poem.

The references in Book I’s prologue to Carthage, and the discovery later in the book that Carthage is ruled by a woman, would have caused a strong and specific reaction in the Roman audience: this is Virgil mingling Rome’s old enemy, Carthage, the opponent in the Punic Wars, with a more recent foe: Cleopatra. Roman society was unambiguous about gender, as Virgil will demonstrate on several occasions in the poem: public roles were to be undertaken by men, whom women were intended to support, mainly by being obedient wives and producers of heirs. As soon as the Roman audience met Dido, therefore, it would find her problematic. It is true that Virgil offers much room for sympathy in Dido’s circumstances: she has been forced to flee for her life after her brother murdered her husband; her situation and that of her followers is

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precarious, since there seem to be no senior, experienced men among her people who might take on the role of war-leader if required – a theme that will recur later in the poem – and Dido is no warrior. It is also the case that when Aeneas walks through the fledgling city, work is progressing in an orderly manner that might elicit a Roman’s admiration:

Aeneas found, where lately huts had been,
Marvelous buildings, gateways, cobbled ways,
And din of wagons. There the Tyrians
Were hard at work: laying courses for walls,
Rolling up stones to build the citadel,
While others picked out building sites and plowed
A boundary furrow. Laws were being enacted,
Magistrates and a sacred senate chosen.
Here men were dredging harbors, there they laid
The deep foundations of a theatre,
and quarried massive pillars. (1. 576–86)

These are elements of urban life that Romans would admire – walls and temples, citadel and senate, law and culture – and when Aeneas first sees Dido, she seems to have little difficulty performing the masculine role of ruler:

in such delight she moved
Amid her people, cheering on the toil
Of a kingdom in the making. At the door
Of the goddess’ shrine, under the temple dome,
Yet, this is a woman leading men, a woman in charge of a kingdom, a woman taking on the role of a man, acting like a man – all simply wrong to the Romans, who would remember Cleopatra’s deleterious influence on Julius Caesar and on Mark Antony, and thus on Rome, and assume at once that Dido would be similarly toxic to Aeneas.

It is notable that Virgil also presents female immortals as problematic, and with less ambiguity and more speed than he does with Dido. In Book I’s prologue, Juno is incontinent and implacable, ‘galled | In her divine pride, […] sore at heart | From her old wound’ (1. 13–15). Thus divine female agency is presented as problematic and irrational; Juno’s anger drives her into attempts to disrupt Aeneas’s journey, despite the fact that he cannot ultimately be prevented from fulfilling his destiny, his fate. Juno abuses her power, bribing Aeolus with a nymph in return for whipping up a sea storm. Venus seems little better: despite Jupiter’s assurances, Venus seems unable to trust her father’s word, nor believe him powerful enough to overrule Juno if necessary. Venus also mistrusts Juno, fearing she will interfere in Dido’s generous hospitality and helpful attitude, so she decides to “ensnare the queen | By guile beforehand, pin her down in passion, | So she cannot be changed by any power | But will be kept on my side by profound | Love of Aeneas” (1. 921–25). Given her role in the classical pantheon, this demonstrates a surprising ignorance of the workings of erotic, or human, or perhaps human erotic love, since it is obvious that this situation, supplanting dead Sychaeus with journeying Aeneas, is likely to cause more problems than it solves. Ultimately, Venus lacks maturity, and fails as a mother in Roman terms: David O. Ross observes that her request to Jupiter is ‘somewhat querulous’ and ‘shows little if any concern for Aeneas’[s] suffering and despair’. She will not even identify herself to her son as she speaks to him, she cuts off his tale of woe, and will not turn back when he recognizes her, leaving him to cry out: “‘You! cruel, too! | Why tease your son so often with disguises? | Why may we not join hands and speak and hear | The simple truth!’” (I. 557–61) How different from Achilleus’s relationship with Thetis.

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POSTSCRIPT: A CAVEAT

Book names and divisions

The book divisions of the Homeric poems are largely agreed not to be original, but there is much contention about when the books were divided and by whom.18 It’s certain that Virgil’s poem was planned as twelve books, but do be aware that the titles of the individual book are the creation of Fitzgerald, not Virgil.

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