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Queen Dido and Empathy: a Different Perspective on an Ancient Epic

By

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In the *Aeneid*, Queen Dido is a tragic character. The layers of her personal tragedy—first losing her husband, then through the intervention of the gods, losing her new love, Aeneas—are calculated by Virgil to provoke male readers to what the ancients called "pathos," but what one might also call "empathy" in the modern world. Through the lens of Aristotle's definition of tragedy, Virgil urges the reader to empathize with her and with her pitiable story.

Before arguing that Virgil wants his readers to empathize with the character of Dido, it is important to have an understanding of what empathy is. Suzanne Keen writes in her book "Empathy and the Novel" that, "Empathy, a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing another's condition, or even by reading" (Keen 4). Her definition sums up empathy well. The word is derived from the Greek word *pathos*, which is defined as "an emotion of sympathetic pity" (Merriam-Webster 1). However, empathy differs from sympathy, because sympathizing with someone is when one feels pity for them, but empathizing with someone is when one feels as the other feels. Simply put, "In empathy, sometimes described as an emotion in its own right, we feel what we believe to be the emotion of others" (Keen 5). Thus, this project will argue that Virgil pushes the reader to feel the emotions of Dido, instead of feeling pity for her character.

This project investigates the relationships between gender, emotion, and madness in a range of pre-modern literary texts. It is evident that extreme emotion is gendered female in early literature. Moreover, violence against women—even sexual violence—is nearly ubiquitous in this literature as well. Associating the female with motive shows that such depictions have contributed to misogynist or masculinist viewpoints. However, this project will instead investigate the role of readers' emotional responses, from identification to sympathy and even empathy, that such writing might hope to produce in readers. That is, these texts, in their

depictions of female characters suffering extreme distress, might provoke audiences to feel pity. This will be done specifically by focusing on the character of Queen Dido.

When many scholars study ancient Rome, they tend to examine the men of the time as the powerful leaders. While that is true, something that may be overlooked is the role of women like Queen Dido from Virgil's famous work the *Aeneid*, who exemplifies a quiet strength in her role and through the decisions that she makes as queen. However, Dido's relationship with Aeneas ultimately leads her to madness. She is a character who has interested many due to her fiery personality, and, subsequently, her fiery suicide.

Woman throughout ancient literature have been studied frequently. Queen Dido in particular is a character who has sparked the interest of many scholars. Scholarship tends to focus on a few different things: Dido and Aeneas, Dido and deception, and Dido and her surrounding culture, and Dido's death. For example, Edward Gutting in his article, "Marriage in the *Aeneid*: Venus, Vulcan, and Dido" examines the difference between marital love and erotic love that Aeneas and Dido experience. Similarly, David Crump in his article "MURDER AND MARRIAGE IN VIRGIL'S AENEID: WHAT THE EPIC TELLS US ABOUT LAW AND SOCIETY TODAY," focuses on the legality of the marriage of Dido and Aeneas, and discusses how it is different than the laws of the modern day. In contrast, K. Paul Bednarowski in his article, "Dido and the Motif of Deception in *Aeneid* 2 and 3" examines Dido being deceived by Venus, and how she may have actually played a part in deceiving Aeneas. Anthony Welch examines the cultural politics between Dido and Aeneas and how that affects their relationship. R. J. Edgeworth, the author of "The Death of Dido," focuses on the significance of Dido's suicide and the method by which she committed this act. There has been a lot of research done on the character of Queen Dido, and how she fits into the *Aeneid*. However, much of this

research has to do with her in relation to Aeneas rather than solely focusing on her. There also is not much research that discusses how her fall from a unique, powerful position leads her madness, which ultimately was meant to cause pity and empathy in ancient readers.

This project will draw upon primary sources in classical, medieval, and early modern studies, including poetry and drama. Secondary sources will draw from feminist theory, gender studies, classics, and literature. The paper will consider how authors turn to mythological women, and Dido specifically, to move audiences to feel a range of emotions, from pity to empathy.

In conducting the research for this project, I am hoping to find a correlation between the madness of ancient literary female characters and the emotional response that it evokes in the reader. Since Roman women were praised for their piety, modesty, and submission, it will be interesting to examine what the response of the readers to the female characters' madness looks like. This project is significant, because it examines the madness of ancient women in a new, more empathetic way, and by doing so, it allows readers to gain a better understanding of these women and the cultural implications that caused them to become mad, specifically through the vessel of Queen Dido.

Dido and Aristotelean Tragedy

As Aristotle describes it in his *Poetics*, tragedy is related to four main points: plot, character, thought, and diction (10). Through these means, the audience of a tragedy might be moved to what he calls "catharsis," or the purging of negative emotions. First and foremost, Aristotle identifies the plot as the biggest role in defining a tragedy. The plot of the life of Dido is no exception to this major, defining point. The classical definition of tragedy is quite different

from the way that tragedy is perceived today. The classical notion of a tragedy is a fall from a position of privilege, which is certainly something that is seen in the life of Dido. Dido enters into the story as a powerful queen. She is revered by the Trojans and runs her kingdom well. However, when the gods intervene, her life begins to spiral into chaos. She is forced by Cupid to fall madly in love with Aeneas, and she neglects her queenly duties. Aeneas leads her on then leaves her for his destiny of founding Rome. This absolutely crushes Dido, and in her fury, she plunges herself onto a pyre, killing herself. The plot of Dido's life is absolutely tragic in Aristotlean terms.

Secondly, the arc of her character is tragic, falling from grace not once, but twice. Dido is first seen as a powerful and respected queen, and is last seen as a crazed woman who kills herself. The story clearly follows the tragic demise of her character, which is brought on by the gods. This also relates to Aristotle's third factor of tragedy, thought. Dido's thoughts, especially during her suicide, are depressed and crazed. She seems to be fighting the curse of love that the gods placed on her, but she is not strong enough to avoid it. Throughout the story, the reader can see Dido's internal struggle through her thoughts.

The diction used surrounding Dido and her tragic life completes Aristotle's fourth element of tragedy. Virgil uses the Latin word "furor" to describe her, which translates to rage or fury. This word was powerful in the Latin language, and was used to describe extreme rage or madness. Dido is initially a composed and powerful queen. She is not described as an emotional character. In fact, she is depicted as an able ruler despite her troubled history before the beginning of the *Aeneid*, in which she led her kingdom well and created a wonderful city. However, when the gods send Cupid to make her fall in love with Aeneas, her character becomes extremely emotional. When this happens, Virgil starts using the word "furor" to describe her.

When Dido discovers Aeneas' plot to leave her, Virgil describes her as, "Furious, at her wits' end, / She traversed the whole city all aflame / with rage, like a Bacchante driven wild." (4.409-411). Throughout the epic, Virgil uses the same word to describe Juno. In this case, however, the furious one is a mortal woman as opposed to a goddess with destructive powers. In this way, Dido is like a human counterpart to Juno in her anger and rage. It also provides a strong contrast between Dido's unrestrained emotions and Aeneas' calm control over his feelings. This is an example of the diction used to describe Dido, which ultimately proves that she is a tragic character. Dido exclaims, "Oh, I am swept away burning by furies!" (4.519). This can be seen as foreshadowing, because in the end she is literally consumed by furor, with its physical form being fire. Her funeral pyre in the *Aeneid* not only burns with fire, but burns with her passions. This is one of the most crucial moments in the text as it relates to the connection between the emotional side of furor and the physical conflagration, which culminates the tragic and emotion diction surrounding her character. The plot and the diction used in the story serve to make the reader aware that what happens to her is unfair. Dido becomes "furor" because of the intervention and interference of both Juno and Venus, not because of her own doing. This, in itself, should allow the reader to see that her character is treated unjustly.

By examining Dido through the lens of Aristotle's tragic elements, one can determine that she is, indeed, a tragic character. Why would Virgil put this powerful queen in the story and turn her life into a tragic existence with an abrupt death? It seems that he wanted the reader to truly empathize with Queen Dido. The reader would have been familiar with Aristotle's definition of tragedy and would have recognized that Dido's story was, indeed, tragic. Given this, the reader could not help but empathize with her.

Virgil's Influences

Virgil's depiction of Dido as a tragic character not only draws from Aristotle, but also the great epics that preceded him. When examining Virgil's character of Dido in the *Aeneid*, it is important to see that he was likely influenced by the epics that preceded him, particularly as he patterned Dido's characterization and story arc after the great epic female characters of the past. It is especially important to see how ancient women were portrayed in literature during Virgil's time in order to see why Virgil asks his readers to empathize with Dido. By examining the women characters in the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and *Argonautica*, the reader can gain a deeper understanding of the sources that Virgil may have used in creating the character of Dido.

Homer was a renowned Greek author who wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which are two of the most famous Greek literary works. These are works that Virgil consciously echoes throughout the *Aeneid*. It is important to focus on gender roles that are seen in these works. Although the stories are mainly concerned with men and their wars, they both are also concerned with the ways in which women are influenced by those wars, particularly in the characters of Chryseis, Helen, Andromache, and Penelope. When examining the *Iliad*, one could argue that it portrays a patriarchal society in which women lack agency. The men in the story often see women as rewards and possessions, which is evident in the way that they act throughout the epic. Though these women play a large role in the Trojan War, they are depicted as helpless prizes that boost the male ego. Thus, Homer's texts do not spend much time on the psychology or emotions of female characters.

This patriarchal attitude toward women can be seen in the first book of the *Iliad*. When Achilles tells Agamemnon to return Chryseis, Agamemnon says,

What do you want? To keep your own prize and have me sit here
lacking one? Are you ordering me to give this girl back?

Either the great-hearted Achaians shall give me a new prize
 chosen according to my desire to atone for the girl lost,
 or else if they will not give me one I myself shall take her,
 your own prize, or that of Aías, or that of Odysseus (1.133-138).

In this segment of the text, Agamemnon is literally talking about Chryseis as if she were a prize, actually referring to her as such. Both Achilles and Agamemnon are more concerned with their own honor and desire than the well-being of the women, Chryseis and Briseis. Agamemnon dehumanizes women in this text by referring to them as prizes. Agamemnon is not only upset that Chryseis has been taken away, but he feels as if he has lost to Achilles. He is upset because his ego and honor have been compromised. In order to restore his honor and ego, he feels that he must take Achilles' prize, Briseis. The way the men discuss this clearly shows that women were not seen as equals to men and were objectified. The way in which women can be captured and exchanged between individuals shows the extent to which women have been commodified.

But if Virgil saw a propensity for treating women as possessions in the *Iliad*, he also undoubtedly found some strength in female characters in Book 3. Helen, who is the wife of the Spartan king Menelaus, is the most important female character in the story. She is the reason that the Trojan War is being waged. While she is praised for her beauty, she also has distinct character traits, unlike many female characters in the story. In Book 3, Helen actually argues with Aphrodite, who is a goddess. That, in itself, is a bold move to make for a woman. She tells Aphrodite that she does not want to go to Troy. Angered by this, Aphrodite curses her, and Helen is forced to love Paris against her own wishes. Even though she is not at fault, she is blamed and hated by both the Greeks and Trojans. Like all other characters in *The Iliad*, Helen falls victim to the whims of the gods. Her boldness is short-lived, and she returns to a helpless female character. What can a mortal do in response to the anger of a goddess? It can be argued that this causes the

reader to sympathize with Helen, to see in her character arc similarities to Dido's. Although it is easy to hate Helen, as indeed Aeneas does in the *Aeneid*, Homer takes pains to demonstrate that she is a pawn in a divine quarrel, which is certainly something that influenced Virgil as he imagined Dido's tragic characteristics.

The reader is not only asked to sympathize with Helen, Virgil also asks the reader to sympathize with the character of Achilles' mother in Book 22. When Hector is outside of the city walls ready to face Achilles, people beg him to come back into safety. One of these people is his mother. Hector's mother pleads with him to come back inside the safety of the walls, but he is too prideful to listen. In her madness and grief, she exposes her breast to him and says, "Hector, my child, if ever I've soothed you / With this breast, remember it now, son, and / Have pity on me. Don't pit yourself / Against that madman. Come inside the wall" (22.91-94). She does this to show how she nurtured him while he was an infant, and relates it back to how he should return the favor by coming back inside of the wall. This plays into the female identity of being sexual or maternal objects, not strong, independent individuals. However, the reader can empathize with the mother, because she shows emotion. This is not always seen in the female characters in the story. After Hector is killed, she tears out her hair in grief. This show of deep emotion, in turn, evokes an emotional response in the reader.

In addition to Hector's mother, the reader is also asked to sympathize with Hector's wife, Andromache, a woman who becomes extremely emotional after she finds out that her husband has died. She has not heard the news, and as she is preparing for a bath, she hears people screaming and crying outside. When she sees Achilles dragging Hector back to the boat, she is overwhelmed with grief. She faints with the shock and sadness that she experiences. Addressing dead Hector, she says,

And now you are going to Hades' dark world,
 Underground, leaving me in sorrow,
 A widow in the halls, with an infant,
 The son you and I bore but cannot bless.
 You can't help him now you are dead, Hector,
 And he can never help you. (22.535-540).

She goes on to say that their son will have to beg for food and water, since his father is not around. This shows that she sees the father figure as the only means to a person's success, and that she was not good enough to raise her son. Through this, one can see that mothers are not even considered useful enough to successfully raise a child without the help of a father. Her emotional nature is evident in this scene as well.

Along with women being portrayed as emotional, they are also portrayed as prizes to be won. In Book 23 of the *Iliad*, women are shown as trophies again. The list of prizes for the winners of the races are described as, "Cauldrons, tripods, horses, mules, powerful oxen, / as well as fine-dressed women and grey iron" (23.312-313). Women are nonchalantly added to this list. This dehumanizes the women and makes them seem as if they are merely possessions to be won. Homer describes the way in which the prizes are given by saying that, "First, he set out prizes for swift charioteers— / for the winner, a woman skilled in fine handicrafts / and a tripod with handles holding twenty measures (23.315-317). It would seem that the woman was not enough of a prize for the winner, since a tripod was also a part of the prize. This further proves the point that women were seen as objects at this time.

Overall, the *Iliad* objectifies women and depicts them as far less valuable and capable than men. Although women have the admirable ability to show emotion, their emotion is often excessive in this work. Through these chapters, women are either indistinguishable as persons from their husbands or treated as prizes to be won. Through this, one does not get a sense of female identity or strength; rather, women are seen as weak and somewhat insignificant.

In contrast to the *Iliad*, women of the *Odyssey* have two major roles: helpers and seducers. *The Odyssey* takes place shortly after the Trojan War has ended, and focuses on the hero Odysseus. Women seem to be more prominent in this story; however, they appear throughout the story playing narrow roles as goddesses, wives, mothers, or servants. By displaying the women in this way, Homer demonstrates that women have the power to either hinder or help men. Two minor characters, Calypso and Athena, have traits and roles that are important to discuss. However, one woman who seems to combine both of these elements is Odysseus' wife, Penelope. By examining these female characters, one can see how Homer viewed women and how they are portrayed differently than men.

Book 1 opens with Odysseus trapped on the island Ogygia by the goddess Calypso. Even though Odysseus is longing for his wife and wants to leave, the narrator says that, "The nymph Calypso, a / powerful goddess—/ And beautiful—was clinging to him / In her caverns and yearned to possess him" (1.17-20). While Odysseus is seduced by her, he wants to leave and continue his return home to Ithaca and his family. He is her captive for seven years before Athena sees his struggles and brings it to the attention of the other gods. Zeus then sends Hermes to the island to tell Calypso that the Olympian gods determined that Odysseus must be let go. This shows two things: male hierarchy and privilege. It shows male privilege, because Zeus is known for adultery and mortal lovers. It also shows the male hierarchy, because even though Calypso opposes Zeus, she eventually agrees to let Odysseus go. Male gods are able to do whatever they please, but goddesses must listen to the gods, which hinders their freedom. Calypso is a tragic goddess. She is banished to Ogygia, and when Odysseus comes, she falls in love with him. However, he is married, and she is forced to let him go. This shows how women

were portrayed as overly emotional and tragic. The reader can certainly empathize with this character who has experienced heartbreak.

Another noteworthy female character is Athena, the goddess of wisdom and battle. She is very involved in Odysseus' journey and helps him out of various grueling situations. She also involves herself in Telemachus' life. She protects Odysseus and Telemachus, and it is with divine powers and blessings that Telemachus and Odysseus are reunited as father and son. She also offers gifts to her followers. She provides the women with skills, as the author states that, "For as the Phaeacian men are skilled above all others in speeding a swift ship upon the sea, so are the women cunning workers at the loom, for Athena has given to them above all others skill in fair handiwork, and an understanding heart" (7.110). She grants these women the skills for their positions in society. Athena is an example of a powerful goddess in *The Odyssey*.

Perhaps the woman who deserves the most attention is Odysseus' wife, Penelope. Penelope plays a unique role because she represents motherly characteristics, but she also has some traits associated with seductresses. Showing her motherly qualities, she seems oblivious to the suitors at first, since she is stricken with grief over her husband's death. She is overly emotional, which could be likened to madness. One can empathize with her, because she is heartbroken over her husband's absence. After she publicly mourns and falls to the ground, Telemachus exerts his masculine leadership over her. He tells her, "Ulysses is not the only man who never came back from Troy, but many another went down as well as he. Go, then, within the house and busy yourself with your daily duties, your loom, your distaff, and the ordering of your servants; for speech is man's matter, and mine above all others- for it is I who am master here" (1.354-358). This quote from Telemachus shows how women were viewed at this time.

They were viewed as second-class citizens. However, Penelope was not only represented as the mourning wife and mother, but also as a seductress.

Penelope has traits of both a mother and a seductress. This can be assumed, for she has many persistent suitors. One suitor, Antinous, complains to Telemachus by saying, "It is your mother's fault not ours, for she is a very artful woman. This three years past, and close on four, she has been driving us out of our minds, by encouraging each one of us, and sending him messages without meaning one word of what she says" (2.89-96). Even though she is mourning her husband, she is also leading on these suitors. She promises that she will marry one of them once she finishes her sewing her wedding veil; however, each evening she destroys the previous evening's work to ensure that it will never be finished. She seduces these men into giving her material objects, and her beauty is mentioned on many occasions. Overall, Penelope has both the traits of a helper, motherly figure and seductress.

Penelope is by far a stronger mortal female character than the women in the *Iliad*. While women are still represented as prizes to be won, Penelope is well-rounded female character with whom the reader can empathize. Although she is completely destroyed with grief over her husband, she still knows how to use the weaknesses of men to her own advantage. This is evident by the way she seduces her suitors into giving her material objects. The women in the *Iliad* do not show this determination and craftiness, which adds another level of depth to Penelope's character. Overall, it is easy to empathize with her.

While *The Odyssey* shows women as seducers, helpers, or a combination of the two, it does a better job rounding out its female characters than the *Iliad* does. The reader can empathize with characters like Calypso and Penelope, who show strong emotional reactions to grief. The female characters, though still not as important as men, have more of a role in this ancient story.

When reading Book 3 of the *Argonautica*, it seems that there is more agency for female characters in this story. Women are certainly not seen as being as authoritative as men, but they do seem to have more authority than in some other comparable literature, such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. In this epic, mediation and maternity serve as markers of authority in women. Those who are politically influential are married or mothers, like Hera and Aphrodite. Hera is described as an experienced mother, and even advises Aphrodite on how to interact with her own son. This shows an instance of female authority, even though it is only authority over another woman.

The warrior Athena is another example of female authority. Even though she is a tough in battle, she is nervous to talk to Aphrodite, because she is self-conscious of her virginity. However, aspects of Athena have been re-imagined in maternal terms. Her main contribution to the voyage concerns the Argo, which she builds and then subsequently pushes through the Clashing Rocks. This act can be compared to birthing or midwifery. Thus, while she does not seem to have as much authority as a character like Medea, a level of authority is still evident in her character.

In contrast, Medea does not exemplify the same kind of authority as the other women. Medea is extremely powerful and dangerous. Because of this, she is feared rather than loved by her own community. Even though she is the daughter of a king and priestess, she mostly isolates herself. In this way, she is like her aunt Circe, the sorceress. The Colchians, who are compared to woodland creatures terrified by Artemis, avoid making eye contact with her as she rides through the town (3.883-6). This shows that her authority is not maternal; rather, it can be seen as a masculine type of authority.

Medea is also a female character who is more rounded. She has internal struggles, which are evident when she searches for poison in her chest of drugs in order to commit suicide. Instead, she finds a drug that would aid in Jason's battle. While the male character Jason still seems to be more important than Medea, he could not have defeated everyone without her. She is the strength behind him. Not only does the drug help him, but he also uses some tricks that Medea taught him to defeat an army of men single-handedly. When she gives him the drug to help him win the battle, he says that he would like to take her as his wife. She does not give him a direct answer. This shows that she is not a typical female character who finds her identity in being a wife or a mother. Overall, Medea seems to be one of the most well-rounded and interesting women characters in ancient literature.

When examining these female characters from ancient authors, it is evident that Virgil drew from these sources in his creation of Dido. However, Virgil made Dido, a mortal female character, much more powerful than the other women that are in ancient literature. He made her into a poised and intelligent queen, which is what creates a sense of empathy in the reader as her tragedy unfolds. Overall, Virgil certainly saw the ways in which women were represented in the literature of his time, and while he did use some aspects of their characteristics, he ultimately made Dido into a more powerful version of these female characters.

Empathy and Virgil's Dido

While Virgil's writing draws from the sources that he would have read, he certainly makes Dido his own unique and powerful character. The way that he portrays her in his writing is different than the other authors portrayed the women in their stories. Virgil truly seems to create a complex and interesting female character, who is unlike her predecessors. However, he goes further than just creating a powerful female character; he creates a tragic female character.

He wants the readers to empathize with her and her fall from grace. By examining his work in the *Aeneid*, the reader is able to see just how tragic the life of Dido is, and thus, become empathetic toward her character.

It is impossible to talk about Dido's tragic character without examining her relationship with Aeneas. Dido and Aeneas have a complex relationship. Since Juno wants to prevent Aeneas from reaching Italy, she decides to use Dido as a hindrance. She sends Cupid down to put a spell on Dido, who falls madly in love with Aeneas. With this, the strong, independent Dido seems to melt into an emotional, somewhat irrational character. There seems to be a tendency to read Dido as whiny and irrational. In a way, Dido represents the ultimate foil to the Roman idea of virtuous masculinity and order: the dangerous, sexual, irrational female. But to see Dido as purely this is not in line with Virgil's portrayal of her. Dido is a sympathetic character and the epitome of a tragedy. Through this, her character causes empathy in the reader. One interesting part of Dido's character is that she starts out with qualities and virtues that the Romans would consider masculine. She is a good ruler, she is brave, and she is powerful. The reader sees this throughout the *Aeneid*. Right before Dido is introduced, Venus tells Aeneas about her. She discusses how Queen Dido was chased from her homeland by her own brother, who also killed her husband. Dido did not run away fearfully, but rather she "laid her plans/to get away and to equip her company" (1.490-1). This company consisted of those who also wanted to escape her brother's rule. Dido led these people to Carthage, where they founded a new city. She became the queen of Carthage, which is known as a city that embodies law and order. It is stated that, "Laws were being enacted, magistrates and a sacred senate chosen" (1.582-3), which ensured that her citizens lived in a just society that had laws. Dido also shows reverence to the gods, since she built sacred temples in the city walls. This can be seen when Virgil talks about the temple "being built by the

Sidonian queen was a great temple planned in Juno's honor, rich in offerings and a godhead there" (1.605-7). All of these qualities come together to show that Dido embodies masculine qualities, and for that, she is a respected and beloved ruler.

However, Dido is more than just a good ruler with masculine courage, strength, and lawfulness; she also exhibits the vital Roman virtue of *pietas* by being empathetic and kind to Aeneas and his men. When they arrive in Carthage and come to her, she is fairly dealing with important matters of the city and assigning tasks to her citizens. The reader sees this when, "She began to give them/judgments and rulings, to apportion work/with fairness, or assign some tasks by lot" (1.690-2). Not only does she care for her citizens, she also bestows this same kindness to the Trojans, telling them that she will assist them in any way possible. She even offer them a place to stay in her city by saying, "Would you care to join us in this realm on equal terms?" (1.777). With this, she was granting Aeneas and his men the same rights and privileges as her own citizens, despite them being strangers.

However, those "masculine" qualities are overturned with the intervention of Juno and Venus. Venus becomes worried that Juno will negatively influence Dido's kind and generous heart towards Aeneas and his men. Determined to secure Dido's assistance, Venus sends the god Cupid to enchant Dido and make her fall madly in love with Aeneas. Disguised as Aeneas' son Ascanius, Cupid sits in Dido's lap and seeks "to waken with new love, a living love, her long settled mind and dormant heart" (1.984-5). Dido becomes infected with Cupid's spell, and she "ached/with longing that her heart's blood fed, a wound/or inward fire eating her away" (4.1-2). Her masculine strength and sense of duty disappear when Dido is forced to submit to this curse of love, as she tells her sister: "I could perhaps give way in this one case to frailty" (4.26). Through their intervention, Dido begins showing feminine characteristics such as love and

madness, which is the catalyst of her impending downfall. This is a reflection of what Romans thought about women, and it shows that in that time, for a woman to be successful, she had to portray masculine qualities.

Shortly after her encounter with Cupid, Dido surrenders to emotion. She begins wandering around aimlessly, since she is so occupied with her desires. Virgil describes her, saying, "Unlucky Dido, burning in her madness roamed through all the city" (4.95-6). She basically abandons her position as the great ruler of Carthage, as she now wanders due to the enchantment. Her duties are neglected due to these new desires, and "towers, half-built, rose no farther; men no longer trained in arms or toiled to make harbors and battlements impregnable" (4.121-4). Quickly, her vast accomplishments are forgotten, and she seems no longer to be the admirable queen that she once was. Virgil claims that rumors begin to spread of her neglect of the city by saying, "her reputation/standing no longer in the way of passion" (4.128-9)

Another way that Dido's emotions can be seen is in the cave scene. In this scene, Juno plots to get Dido and Aeneas alone together to prolong his journey to Italy. She enlists the help of Venus, Aeneas' mother, who obliges. Juno causes a massive storm while Aeneas and Dido are out hunting, which forces them to seek shelter in a cave together. Virgil implies that they have sexual relations while they are in the cave, and Dido leaves thinking that she and Aeneas are married. However, Aeneas does not think that they are married. This leaves the reader, and even Dido, asking, are the two actually married? This wedding has no human witnesses, and Aeneas does not even know that they are married, so it makes the reader question if this wedding is actually legitimate. However, Virgil calls it a wedding and uses a serious tone, so Dido's point of view may not be crazy. The passage in the texts states that, "Primal Earth and nuptial Juno give the sign; fires flashed in Heaven, the witness to their bridal, and on the mountaintop screamed

the Nymphs. That day the first of death, the first of calamity was cause. For no more is Dido swayed by fair show or fair fame, no more does she dream of a secret love: she calls it marriage and with that name veils her sin” (IV. 160-172). First, Virgil uses the adjective “nuptial” to describe Juno. While Juno is the goddess of marriage, why would she want Aeneas to be happy and get married without some form of an ulterior motive? Juno does not care if Aeneas is happy or not; she just wants to prevent his founding of Rome. Thus, it can be argued that Juno married the two, thinking that Aeneas would want to stay in Carthage for a longer period of time. This shows that Virgil is not afraid to show Juno’s motives, and that there is cause to think that this is actually a wedding ceremony. Earlier in the chapter, Juno stated that, “I will be there and, if I can be sure of your good will, will link them in sure wedlock, sealing her for his own; this shall be their bridal!” (4.127-128). Juno does not just want them to have sex in the cave; she actually wants them to get married. Virgil uses the language of “wedlock,” “sealing,” and “bridal,” which shows that the reader is supposed to view Juno’s plan as one of marriage. They also had nymphs as witnesses. Even though there were no human witnesses, this is extremely interesting, because it shows that there was actually something to witness. If there were no wedding, there would not be a need for witnesses of any kind, human or nymph. Virgil certainly uses this to paint a picture of an actual wedding ceremony.

Why would Virgil leave ambiguity at such a pivotal moment of Aeneas’ journey? Some may argue that the marriage between the two is not actually important. The cave scene may just be another small distraction or bump in the road during Aeneas’ journey to found Rome. However, it seems that it is more than that. Virgil may have wanted to leave this ambiguity to let the reader in on the sense of madness that Dido is experiencing. Virgil may be doing this to allow the reader to truly empathize with Queen Dido. He may want the reader to feel the

confusion and lack of clarity that she felt as she wandered through the thick fog of her maddening, passionate love for Aeneas. This is not something that Dido asked for. She was powerful, respected, and loved. She vowed that she would not marry again after the loss of her husband. It was something that was thrown upon her by the gods, and she had no choice in the matter. Maybe the ambiguous nature of her marriage to Aeneas is Virgil's way of showing the reader a brief snapshot of the confusion that Dido was unfairly living through.

The wedding ceremony was not the only ambiguous part of the cave scene. The reader is also led to believe that Dido and Aeneas had sexual relations. The text discusses Dido trying to veil her sin, or as the word in the language of origin would be, *peccatum*. This neuter noun comes from the Latin verb *pecco*, which means to offend or sin. The noun itself can also be translated as "error," which would also fit well into this context. As discussed previously, throughout Book 4 of the *Aeneid*, the reader sees Dido get struck by Cupid and fall madly in love with Aeneas. She does not make this love known, even though the reader knows how she feels. She is conflicted, because she decided that she would not remarry after her husband died, but her feelings for Aeneas are strong. She fights them and tries to keep them internal, but being in the cave with Aeneas changes things. Her secret love of Aeneas is sealed. It is no longer a dream, but a reality. This leads the reader to believe that she and Aeneas have sex. This is especially convincing, because Virgil says that she calls this a marriage in order to veil her sin. Her love for Aeneas only grows stronger after their encounter in the cave, and rightfully so. Even though Aeneas does not think that they are married, he definitely leads her on to believe that they are a couple. He has sex with her, and it really does seem as if he loves her.

Shortly after the two are in the cave together, Rumour, who is described as a vigorous, swift goddess, runs through the cities of Libya. They call her "a monster awful and huge, who for

the many feathers in her body has as many watchful eyes beneath – wondrous to tell – as many tongues, as many sounding mouths, as many pricked-up ears. By night, midway between heaven and earth, she flies through the gloom, screeching, and droops not her eyes in sweet sleep; by day she sits on guard on high rooftop or lofty turrets, and affrights great cities, clinging to the false and the wrong, yet heralding truth. Now exulting in manifold gossip, she filled the nations and sang alike of fact and falsehood” (IV.180-190). She spreads the news about Aeneas and Dido, which causes quite a stir. However, what is interesting is that she spreads fact and falsehood. Is their marriage a fact, or a falsehood? Is Virgil leaving this up to the reader to decide? This news especially angers King Iarbus, who wants to marry Dido. He complains to Jupiter, and Mercury hears this. That is the catalyst for Mercury sending Aeneas back on his journey to found Rome, which ultimately leads to Dido’s demise.

Aeneas’ leaving has a catastrophic effect on Dido. When she was first struck with her love for Aeneas, she abandoned all her duties and gave herself completely to her newfound love. However, when she finds out that Aeneas is leaving, she becomes completely consumed with fierce, uncontrollable anger. She made great sacrifices in behalf of their love, and she tells him this by saying, "Because of you, I lost my integrity and that admired name by which alone I made my way once toward the stars" (4.440-2). Dido gave up everything for Aeneas. She recognizes that she has lost the independence and control that she once held, and the thought of losing Aeneas’ love is too much for her to bear. However, Aeneas is still determined to leave Carthage and Dido for the sake of his journey to Rome. This infuriates Dido, who seems no longer to be in control of her mind. The reader gets a peek into Dido’s madness, because the text states that she was "so broken in mind by suffering, Dido caught her fatal madness and resolved

to die" (4.656-57). Dido, the once powerful queen in control of Carthage, no longer seems to have control, even over her own mind.

Her madness only grows when she see Aeneas sailing out to sea. She becomes consumed with rage and malice. Her loss of control becomes more evident, and the text shows that she does not have any control over her actions or words when she states, "What am I saying? Where am I? What madness takes me out of myself?" (4.825-6). The fog that the gods swirled around Dido becomes thicker, and her confusion only grows with each rage-filled thought. Dido curses Aeneas as he sails away, saying, "Let him beg assistance, let him see the unmerited deaths of those around and with him, and accepting peace, on unjust terms, let him not, even so, enjoy his kingdom or the life he longs for, but fall in battle before his time and lie unburied on the sand!" (4.857-63). Her words are powerful, especially because in Roman times, proper burials enabled the person's soul to be sent to the afterlife.

During her rage, Dido resolves to kill herself. Her fury was so great that, "at her passion's height she climbed the pyre and bared the Dardan sword" (4.987-8). Her last words before her death focus on her wonderful accomplishments, that show her glorious rule, before she was consumed with passion that she did not ask for: "I built a famous town, saw my great walls, avenged my husband, made my hostile brother pay for his crime" (4.910-2). It seems as if Dido realizes that she will never be able to regain her former self, so she throws herself onto the pyre. Dido, the once majestic queen, dies a fiery death that matches the fury that the gods had stirred up in her.

Dido, the once powerful queen of Carthage, finds herself in the underworld. This underworld is called Dis, and Dido is wandering through the Fields of Mourning. This is the place in Dis where the people who died of love reside. It seems that Aeneas knew that Dido

killed herself when he left her. Feeling this guilt, Aeneas quickly explains himself, stating how he left because the gods told him to, not because he wanted to. He tries to justify himself to her, and seems very emotional. However, Dido is unforgiving, and turns toward her husband Sychaeus instead.

Something of interest in this episode is the way in which the dynamic of the relationship between Dido and Aeneas completely changes. These two, who were very much in love, are now acting much differently. Claudia Zanardi in her book *Essential Papers on the Psychology of Women* states that, “When Aeneas encounters consequences of his actions that he had neither believed nor intended and Dido, once generous and responsive, is rendered by grief cold and impassive, this disjunction momentarily surfaces” (481). This encapsulates the emotions occurring in this episode. Dido does not say a word to Aeneas. She does not even look at him. Virgil discusses this by saying, “She, turning away, kept her looks fixed on the ground and no more changes her countenance as he essays to speak than if she were set in hard flint or Marpesian rock,” (6.469-471). She, who was a character unafraid to speak her mind, is at a loss for words. It seems as if she does not think having a conversation with Aeneas is worth her time, even though he is apologetic and explains the situation. Aeneas does not want to leave Dido, but fate calls him to.

Marilyn Skinner also had an interesting point about the encounter between Dido and Aeneas in Book 6. Talking about their time together in the Field of Mourning, she stated that, “Here it is Aeneas' turn to plead tearfully, Dido's turn to stand hard and silent; her turn, at length, to run away, his to make hopeless efforts to prevent her. This interchange of roles brings home to Aeneas the part he played in Dido's tragedy” (12). This is a complete role reversal from Book 4. In Book 4, Dido is the one who grieves and begs Aeneas to stay. She battles fierce love and bitter

anger. Aeneas, following the will of the gods, turns from Dido, and Dido, after being scarred and abandoned by Aeneas, turns from him in the underworld. Aeneas also tries to sneak away without mentioning anything to Dido, because he does not know how to tell her of his own leaving. He wants to remain silent, just as Dido did in the underworld.

This episode is very interesting, and adds a lot to the story of the *Aeneid* as a whole. It is a good example of the way in which loss is associated with the founding of the Roman people. In order for something good to happen, sacrifices have to be made. Aeneas makes a huge sacrifice by leaving Dido. Book 6 of the *Aeneid* is a pivotal part of the story, and Aeneas' interaction with Dido is important to gain a deeper understanding of Aeneas' and Dido's emotional states and who they truly are.

Dido's Afterlife: Geoffrey Chaucer and Christopher Marlowe

Dido is a character whom the reader can empathize with, and thus, she had an influence on writers other than Virgil. Two of the most notable authors who extended and analyzed the character of Dido are Geoffrey Chaucer and Christopher Marlowe. Both of these authors take elements from Virgil's original character, but they also add their own flair to Dido's personality. It is important to see what these authors perceived Dido to be, and analyzing their writings allows the reader to get a broader understanding of Dido and her influence. In particular, I argue that these two authors pick up on Dido as an empathetic figure, as they emphasize that in their writings.

The longest segment of Chaucer's poem *The Legend of Good Women* is the part that is devoted to Dido. Chaucer's work focuses on the retelling of stories of women that demonstrate greatness and recounts an altered version of the story of Dido, presenting her as a victim. Like Virgil, Chaucer praises the generosity and beauty of Dido. However, unlike Virgil, he does not

compliment her ability to rule as a powerful queen. In Chaucer's narrative, Dido plays the part of a lover without acting like the powerful queen that Virgil wrote her to be. In the article "Chaucer's 'Legend of Dido': A Feminist Exemplum," the author George Sanderlin states that, "But Chaucer's heroine is characterized almost from beginning to end not as a leader and queen but as a victim of a dishonorable man" (Sanderlin 332). Aeneas becomes the enemy and Dido becomes the victim. Chaucer holds Dido less responsible for her actions due to her feminine weakness. Chaucer shows ways that he can exonerate the Dido figure, knowing that Virgil may have used Dido to show the anxieties that the Romans had about foreigners and women. He changes the plot to enhance his message about feminine virtue. He solidifies the fact that Dido and Aeneas got married by saying:

That sely Dido rewede on his peyne,
 And tok hym for husbonde and becom his wyf
 For everemo, whil that hem last lyf. (*Legend* 1236-9)

Chaucer puts emphasis on the fact that the marriage of Dido and Aeneas has validity by offering these lines. While in the original story, the marriage can be viewed as somewhat suspect, here Chaucer makes it clear that Aeneas and Dido have been married. In Chaucer's telling, Dido even admits that she is pregnant by saying, "I am with childe, and yeve my child his lyf! / Mercy, lord! Have pite in youre thought! / But al this thing awayleth hire ryght nought" (1323- 6). By providing Dido with a child (or, at least, in her declaration that she is pregnant), it seems that Chaucer asks the reader to feel "pite" for Dido's situation. This is another way that he victimizes Dido and makes Aeneas look like a villain. Proclaiming Dido's innocence, the narrator further contrasts his ideal Dido with Virgil's flawed Dido. It would be possible to believe that Virgil's Dido was a true victim only if she were really married, did not fully understand Aeneas' intentions, and had the possibility of becoming a mother.

Dido expresses her fear of how Aeneas' leaving will impact her life, both personally and as the ruler of her people. She is certain that her reputation has been ruined by her relationship with Aeneas and his abandonment of her. Her greatest concern is what "wikked Fame" will have to say about her, "that I ne shal be seyde, allas, / Yshamed be thourgh Eneas, / And that I shal thus juged be" (HF 349, 354-357). This fear of Fame's judgment is one of the key factors in her decision to end her own life. Her grief at being abandoned, shock at being betrayed, and fear of what life with a ruined reputation holds for her prove too much for the wretched queen, and she stabs herself through the heart, eradicating her shame through her death.

Chaucer differs greatly from Virgil's perspective on the story. Virgil tells the story of Aeneas's destiny in founding Rome, which causes him to leave Dido. The poem's trajectory makes necessary not only Aeneas abandoning Dido, but also the death of Creusa. In Virgil's work, Dido is ultimately presented as a hindrance to his journey and trial that he must overcome to become the founder of Rome. Chaucer, however, portrays a different side. He focuses on the heartbroken, abandoned woman who cannot simply get on a ship to escape her shame and her grief like Aeneas did. According to Virgil, Dido is important, but not the most compelling part of the story. Through Chaucer, she is the protagonist of the story. Through this choice, Chaucer seems to be asking the readers to empathize with Dido even more. He gives her emotions the spotlight. Her wrenching heartbreak and depression are raw and real, and some readers have certainly felt the way that Dido did. Chaucer gives that aspect of Dido more attention, which ultimately allows for more empathy.

Similarly, Christopher Marlowe's work entitled *Dido, Queen of Carthage* focuses on different aspects of Dido and evokes an emotional response out of the reader. Something uniquely interesting about Marlowe's work, however, is the way that he plays with tragedy.

While Virgil's work tells of the tragedy of Dido's death and Chaucer's work makes Dido into a more victimized and sad character, Marlowe decides that one tragedy is not enough. Marlowe adds to the unrequited love found in the other works. Along with Dido's passion for Aeneas, Marlowe introduces other victims of unreturned love in Jupiter with Ganymede and Anna with Iarbus. In multiplying the romantic tragedies, Marlowe understands that unrequited love is something that piques the interest of the readers. He may have also thought that the readers empathize with the Dido character, and because of this, he decided to include other characters who had similar levels of raw emotion. He also makes Dido a stronger leader than she was in the *Aeneid*, which makes her change even more dramatically tragic.

While the added tragic elements differ from Virgil's original story, Dido is definitely similar to Virgil's representation of her. She is presented as a powerful and insightful leader, similar to her power in the *Aeneid*. Her power and confidence seem to be even more extensive in this story. Clare R. Kinney in her article *Epic Transgression and the Framing of Agency in Dido Queen of Carthage* stated that:

Transforming epic into tragic drama, Marlowe seems to offer a "Dido script" centering upon Dido's subject position, Dido's desires, Dido's will. Marlowe's female prince is no longer simply a victim of Aeneas's manifest destiny and Virgil's epic machinery: her fantasies of absolute agency intermittently threaten to rewrite imperial mythology and literary history" (Kinney 265).

In this story, Dido is, no doubt, the center of attention. During her first meeting with Aeneas in the play, she behaves like a powerful queen would. She recognizes her superiority and does not act like a woman who is weak. During this exchange, Dido speaks her mind directly to Aeneas, and she even comes across as condescending. She asks, "What stranger art thou that dost eye me thus? / Warlike Aeneas, and in these base robes? / Go fetch the garment which Sichaeus ware" (2.1.74, 78-80). It seems as if she is in disbelief that Aeneas is so weak, and she belittles

him openly. She also insults him further by degrading his Trojan robes. She then dresses him in what she feels is the proper attire of a warrior, which are the robes of her husband, Sychaeus. She also reprimands him for humbly asking for a place to stay by saying, "Remember who thou art. Speak like thyself; / Humility belongs to common grooms" (2.1.100-101). Dido is not infatuated with Aeneas. She does not even seem particularly interested in him. Rather, she seems disappointed. This is certainly opposes the way that Virgil wrote Dido's character.

It is important to examine why Marlowe decided to alter Dido's story. It seems as if he wanted to make the tragedy of Dido even greater than Virgil's narrative. By creating a more powerful, detached Dido, it only heightens the tragedy of her fall from power and, ultimately, sanity. It seems as if Marlowe himself empathized with Dido, and he wanted to create her as an even more tragic character. By creating other instances of unrequited love, he adds even more tragedy to the story. Marlowe makes it nearly impossible to miss the tragedy of Dido's story, thus encouraging his readers to empathize with her character.

Chaucer and Marlowe were certainly influenced by Virgil's writing, specifically in the character of Dido. Both authors found her so intriguing that they decided to write about her. This proves that her character was quite influential, and that the authors may have empathized with her in the way that Virgil intended.

Although critics have traditionally understood Dido as a tragic actress or pawn in a divine squabble, Virgil's deviations from his sources, as well as subsequent artists' treatment of the Dido myth, suggest that empathy is the underlying emotion that Virgil wants his readers to feel when reading of Dido. Although Virgil drew some aspects of Dido from his sources, he ultimately adds more depth to her by making Dido into a powerful poised queen. However, she represents true tragedy, according to Aristotle's definition. By starting out as a powerful ruler

and becoming a crazed, love-struck woman due to the intervention of the gods, Dido falls from her prominent position and loses everything. By following the tragic elements designed by Aristotle, the readers would have automatically associated Dido's story with that of tragedy and heartbreak. This is an important tool that Virgil uses in asking readers to empathize with Dido, especially since she had no control over the matter. Dido's influence goes beyond ancient times, as other authors have been inspired by her unique character. Marlowe and Chaucer both seemed to understand the empathy surrounding Dido, and subsequently, were influenced by Virgil to write about her. Ultimately, Virgil asks his readers to empathize with Queen Dido, which is the reason that her character has gained the attention of many, both in the past and present.

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