

Dido: Concepts of a Literary Figure from Virgil to Purcell

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The story of Dido, queen of Carthage, was already known to early Greek historiographers.¹ And it is possible (though cannot be proved beyond doubt) that an encounter between Dido and Aeneas featured as part of a flashback on Rome's early history within Naevius' epic narrative of the First Punic War in his *Bellum Poenicum* in the third century BC.² The love relationship between Dido and Aeneas was certainly familiar to late-Republican scholars.³ But it was Virgil who, in the Augustan period, developed and embellished the story, giving it its canonical shape; he turned it into a dramatic love affair as well as a central element of Rome's history and national consciousness. Although it is perhaps the tragic love story that sticks in most people's minds, there is also a political aspect in Virgil, when Dido, shortly before her death, utters a curse that asks her countrymen to "persecute with hate his stock and all the race to come", wishing that "no love or treaty

¹ See Timaius, *FGrH* 566 F 82; on the figure of Dido see also Serv. ad Virg. *Aen.* 1.340; 1.343.

² Dido was mentioned in Naevius (Naev. *Bell. Poen.* frg. 17 *FPL*^a = Serv. auct. ad Virg. *Aen.* 4.9: *cuius filiae fuerint Anna et Dido, Naevius dicit*). And it is often inferred, mainly on the basis of a key fragment (Naev. *Bell. Poen.* frg. 20 *FPL*^a) as well as of assumptions about the development of the story, that there was an encounter between her and Aeneas in Naevius' epic; but the interpretation is uncertain and controversial. See e.g. Horsfall (1973–74) esp. 10–12; Luck (1983) esp. 270–71, supporting an encounter of Dido and Aeneas in Naevius; Parroni (1987) esp. 715, somewhat more sceptical; for bibliography see Suerbaum (1980, 275–77).

³ See Varro, *apud* Serv. ad Virg. *Aen.* 4.682; Ateius *apud* Charisium, p. 162.6–9 Barwick.

unite the nations”, and hopes for an avenger “to harass the Trojan settlers with fire and sword – today, hereafter, whenever strength be ours” (*Aen.* 4.621–29).⁴

Later poets returning to the figure of Dido and her story (often separated from the overall Virgilian context) have taken up both these aspects, while transferring form and content to new contexts and purposes. This paper looks at the modifications of key motifs by means of significant examples of later depictions of Dido in different periods, literary genres and settings, and discusses how essential elements of the Virgilian basis have been developed and adapted to new frameworks, which range from Roman antiquity, almost contemporary with Virgil, to early modern times.

Against the background of Virgil’s depiction, this overview will start with a look at the way in which Dido was approached in the first major presentation of her after Virgil, in another Augustan work, Ovid’s *Heroides*, and then go on to consider Dido’s role in Silius Italicus’ Flavian epic *Punica*. It will then move on to treatments in the Middle Ages and the early modern period: the examples considered are the epic narrative *Eneas* by the medieval German poet Heinrich von Veldeke, Christopher Marlowe’s drama *The Tragedie of Dido, Queene of Carthage*, written in the sixteenth century, and the opera *Dido and Aeneas*, set to music by Henry Purcell in the late seventeenth century. Thus a range of genres and periods will be covered. The survey of paradigmatic examples will end with conclusions on the development and influence of the figure of Virgil’s Dido over the centuries.⁵

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Although Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is an “epic” very different from Virgil’s *Aeneid*, one might still expect Dido to play a major role in its final books, which narrate the

⁴ *Haec precor, hanc vocem extremam cum sanguine fundo. / Tum vos, o Tyrii, stirpem et genus omne futurum / exercete odiis, cinerique haec mittite nostro / munera. Nullus amor populis nec foedera sunt. / Exoriare aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor / qui face Dardanio ferroque sequare colonos, / nunc, olim, quocumque dabunt se tempore vires. / Litora litoribus contraria, fluctibus undas / imprecor, arma armis: pugnent ipsique nepotesque.* (“This is my prayer; this last utterance I pour out with my blood. Then do you, Tyrians, pursue with hate his whole stock and the race to come, and to my dust offer this tribute! Let no love or treaty unite the nations! Arise from my ashes, unknown avenger, to harass the Trojan settlers with fire and sword – today, hereafter, whenever strength be ours! May coast with coast conflict, I pray, and sea with sea, arms with arms; war may they have, themselves and their children’s children!” Trans. here and in all quotes from *Aen.* is from Rushton Fairclough & Goold, 1999).

⁵ For an extensive list of the numerous adaptations of the Dido story in literature and music (with notes and bibliography) see Kailuweit (2005), including the works discussed here; for bibliography see also Binder, Lindken & Molke (2000). For a discussion of examples from antiquity and the Middle Ages see Hamm (2008). For the reception of Dido in English-language literature see Molke (2000).

early History of Rome and have been called “Ovid’s *Aeneid*” by scholars.⁶ However, Ovid, using a well-known technique of his, avoids telling what Virgil had already narrated, and replaces Virgil’s tales by other stories. Accordingly, he manages to squeeze the story of Dido into four lines in *Metamorphoses* 14: he simply mentions that Aeneas gets shipwrecked in Carthage, Dido falls in love, cannot bear the separation and kills herself on the pyre; she is called the “Sidonian” in this context, and her name does not appear once in the *Metamorphoses* (14.77–81).⁷ Ovid also mentions Dido briefly in the *Fasti*, where he gives a detailed narrative of the fate of her sister Anna, on the occasion of the festival of Anna Perenna on 15th March (*Fast.* 3.523–656; see below). This story focuses on Anna, and the poet refers only to Dido’s death and the inscription on her tomb, in which Aeneas is identified as the cause for her suicide (545–50).⁸

However, Ovid has not missed the opportunity to present a full portrayal of Dido; yet he sketches her in a manner very different from Virgil, by featuring her in another literary genre. Ovid has Dido write a letter to Aeneas as part of his collection of *Heroides* (*Her.* 7).⁹ This means that the story of Aeneas is no longer told with *pious Aeneas* as the protagonist, but from the perspective of the abandoned Dido. Ovid presupposes knowledge of the basics of the story and of its major previous literary treatment, playing with a new and unusual perspective. Thus Dido’s letter develops and modifies the love relationship as presented in Virgil’s *Aeneid* 4.

Dido’s letter is set after Aeneas has decided to leave Carthage. It shows her state of mind as she considers the moral implications of Aeneas’ behaviour and of her own conduct. She urges him to delay departure, but eventually proclaims her resolve to

⁶ See e.g. Myers (2009) *passim*.

⁷ *Libycas vento referuntur ad oras. / Excipit Aenean illic animoque domoque / non bene discidium Phrygii latura mariti / Sidonis, inque pyra sacri sub imagine facta / incubuit ferro deceptaque decipit omnes.* (“The wind bore them to the Libyan coast. There the Sidonian queen received Aeneas hospitably in heart and home, doomed ill to endure her Phrygian lord’s departure. On a pyre, built under pretence of sacred rites, she fell upon his sword; and so, herself disappointed, she disappointed all”. trans. Miller & Goold, 1984). On those lines see e.g. Myers (2009) 69–71 (with further references).

⁸ *Arserat Aeneae Dido miserabilis igne, / arserat extractis in sua fata rogis, / compositusque cinis, tumulique in marmore carmen / hoc breve, quod moriens ipsa reliquit, erat: / Praebuit Aeneas et causam mortis et ensem: / ipsa sua Dido concidit usa manu.* (“Poor Dido had burned with the fire of love for Aeneas; she had burned, too, on a pyre built for her doom. Her ashes were collected, and on the marble of her tomb was this short stanza, which she herself dying had left: ‘Aeneas caused her death and lent the blade: Dido by her own hand in dust was laid’”. trans. Frazer & Goold, 1989).

⁹ For a comparison of the treatments in Virgil and Ovid see e.g. Jacobson (1974) 76–93 (though with a markedly evaluative approach).

take her own life by his sword. By giving Dido a voice in a long letter (almost 200 lines), Ovid combines, as it were, her speeches in Virgil's *Aeneid* into one continuous utterance in terms of form; and by using the device of a letter he does away with the need for her sister Anna as an intermediary to convey messages.

In terms of content, Ovid's Dido acknowledges that Aeneas is on a mission and cites divine orders as the reason for his decisions; she also mentions her own experiences with founding a city. She offers Aeneas power and safety in a new country if he remains with her in Carthage, and she points out that he is travelling not to his home country, but to an unknown place whose location he does not know and where he might only arrive in old age, as the gods are moving him across the sea. By highlighting the apparent irrationality of Aeneas' mission and the human suffering that it causes, Ovid has Dido question the central importance, purpose and uniqueness of Aeneas' task to found a new Troy. With the urgency of Aeneas' mission downplayed and a focus on his behaviour as a lover, Dido appears as a disappointed elegiac heroine, abandoned by her lover.

As regards details, key elements of Dido's speeches in Virgil's *Aeneid* are repeated, but typically with a twist. For instance, whereas Virgil's Dido claims that she could bear the separation more easily "if before your flight a child of yours had been born to me, if in my hall a baby Aeneas were playing, whose face, in spite of all, would bring back yours" (*Aen.* 4.327–30),¹⁰ Ovid's Dido criticizes Aeneas, since his departure not only causes Dido's death, but possibly also that of their unborn child (133–38).¹¹ In Virgil's *Aeneid* the union in the cave during the tempest is described in an authorial comment by the poet as "the first day of death, the first of calamity", while Dido herself seems pleased with the "marriage" as she calls it (*Aen.* 4.169–72).¹² Ovid's Dido is made to allude to Virgil's account when she says that this

¹⁰ *Saltem si qua mihi de te suscepta fuisset / ante fugem suboles, si quis mihi parvulus aula / luderet Aeneas, qui te tamen ore referret, / non equidem omnino capta ac deserta viderer.*

¹¹ *Forsitan et gravidam Didon, scelerate, relinquo / parsque tui lateat corpore clausa meo. / Accedet fati matris miserabilis infans / et nondum nati funeris auctor eris. / Cumque parente sua frater morietur Iuli, / poenaque connexos auferet una duos.* ("Perhaps, too, it is Dido soon to be mother, O evil-doer, whom you abandon now, and a part of your being lies hidden in myself. To the fate of the mother will be added that of the wretched babe, and you will be the cause of doom to your yet unborn child; with his own mother will Iulus' brother die, and one fate will bear us both away together". Trans. here and in all quotes from Ov. *Her.* is from Showerman & Goold, 1977).

¹² *Ille dies primus leti primusque malorum / causa fuit; neque enim specie famave movetur / nec iam furtivum Dido mediatum amorem: / coniugium vocat, hoc praetexit nomine culpam.*

“dreadful day was my ruin” and thinks that in fact it was “the Eumenides sounding the signal for my doom” (89–94).¹³

After she has expressed her resolve to die, Ovid’s Dido ends her letter as follows (193–96): “Nor when I have been consumed upon the pyre, shall my inscription read: ‘Elissa, wife of Sychaeus’; let this brief epitaph be read on the marble of my tomb: ‘From Aeneas came the cause of her death, and from him the blade; from the hand of Dido herself came the stroke by which she fell’”.¹⁴ The event has not happened yet, but it is obvious what will follow, and Dido herself, aware of her fate, interprets its causes and consequences in advance. With her final words, Ovid has Dido indicate how she wants to be perceived after her suicide. The intended inscription on her tombstone (the same as in the *Fasti*), which focuses solely on Aeneas as the cause of her death, has her appear as an innocent victim, while Virgil’s depiction is not quite so straightforward. Ovid’s presentation remains on a personal level, and there is hardly any hint of a historic dimension or of a more general aspect of the relations between peoples.

Ovid singles out Dido by the literary form he has chosen, thereby, he can present the story from the female point of view, outlined by a self-conscious and metaliterary heroine, and focus on the love affair.

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The story of Dido is treated rather differently in Silius Italicus’ *Punica*, the seventeen-book epic from the Flavian period on the Second Punic War. Silius narrates the history of this war more or less chronologically, but he has a number of longer and shorter aetiological insertions that explain the war’s genesis and outcome by means of flashbacks and flashforwards. Hence he comes back again and again to the Trojan War and its aftermath, particularly Aeneas’ encounter with Dido, as the ultimate cause for the present war.

Silius starts off by giving hints about the causes of the war at the very beginning of his poem. It is well known that through the phrasing of the first couple of lines he makes

¹³ *His tamen officiis utinam contenta fuisset / nec mea concubitus fama sepulta foret! / Illa dies nocuit, qua nos declive sub antrum / caeruleus subitis compulit imber aquis. / Audieram vocem, nymphas ululasse putavi: / Eumenides fati signa dedere meis.* (“Yet would I had been content with these kindnesses, and that the story of our union were buried! That dreadful day was my ruin, when sudden downpour of rain from the deep-blue heaven drove us to shelter in the lofty grot. I had heard a voice; I thought it a cry of the nymphs – ’twas the Eumenides sounding the signal for my doom!”)

¹⁴ *Nec consumpta rogis inscribar ‘Elissa Sychaei’, / hoc tantum in tumuli marmore carmen erit: / Praebuit Aeneas et causam mortis et ense. / ipsa sua Dido concidit usa manu’.*

an implicit generic and metaliterary statement : *ordior arma, quibus caelo se gloria tollit / Aeneadam patiturque ferox Oenotria iura / Carthago* (“Here I begin the war by which the fame of the Aeneadae was raised to heaven and proud Carthage submitted to the rule of Italy”, 1.1–3. trans. Duff, 1934). In those lines Silius simultaneously defines himself as a successor of Virgil and sets himself apart from him: in opening the epic with *ordior arma* and calling the Romans *Aeneadae*, the poet alludes to the first line of Virgil’s *Aeneid* (*arma virumque cano*), while he distinguishes himself by changing the position and role of *arma* and omitting the focus on *vir*.

In the introductory section that follows immediately after the proem (1.21–139), Silius elaborates further on the background to the present war, motivating it on three levels: historical (Hannibal), “mythical” (Dido) and divine (Juno). In this way, the poet confirms beyond the proem that he has selected a historical topic for this epic and is aware of the historical agents, but also shows himself eager to connect his main subject to Rome’s early history and thereby to explain the war’s genesis. The mythical figure of Dido is thus directly linked to the Second Punic War.

Out of later additions to the complex of explanations of the causes of the Second Punic War, the longest and the most telling scene is the episode of Anna Perenna at the beginning of book 8 (25–241),¹⁵ *i.e.* shortly before the narration of the battle of Cannae, which is set in the middle of the epic. When Hannibal in Italy is troubled by problems at home and successes of the Roman general Fabius (8.1–24), Juno intervenes by engaging Anna to cheer up Hannibal and make him march into battle (25–38). According to Silius, Anna is both Dido’s sister and a tutelary nymph of the Italic river Numicius. Hence Juno tries to induce Anna to carry out her orders by pointing out that Hannibal is a blood relation of hers, descended from the same ancestor as Dido and Anna herself (8.30–31).

Elsewhere, this identification of two individuals called Anna is attested only in Ovid’s *Fasti* (3.523–656). The identification causes difficulties, clearly voiced in Anna’s reply: she feels obliged to comply with Juno’s request, and begs that she may retain the favour of her ancient native country and carry out the orders of her sister, although the deity of Anna is among those honoured in Latium (8.40–43). This remarkable reaction on Anna’s part provokes an authorial comment from the poet, who claims that far back in history lies the answer to the question of why Dido’s sister is worshipped in the country of Aeneas’ descendants; he will therefore recall this legend from the past (44–49).

¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion of this scene and further references, see Manuwald (2010).

The authorial intervention and explicit introduction of a “historical” excursus suggest that the explanation is important to the poet. Silius apparently chose this particular set-up so as to be able to include the story of Anna and thus to clarify the character of the relationship between Romans and Carthaginians. So this tale could function as a convenient element for Silius in his “historical” strategy. But it also allowed him to enter into an intertextual relationship with Ovid on top of that with Virgil.

The love affair between Dido and Aeneas has already been alluded to in Silius’ description of Hannibal’s shield (2.395–456): it could be included among the decorations, since the decoration of this shield is concerned with the past and not with the future, in contrast to Aeneas’ shield in Virgil’s *Aeneid* (8.625–731). Hannibal’s shield features a brief panorama of the main events in Carthage featured in *Aen.* 1 and 4: it shows the building of Carthage, Aeneas’ arrival in Carthage, the secret pact of the lovers during the hunt, the departure of Aeneas’ fleet and Dido’s death on the pyre watched by Aeneas from the sea, as he leaves to his destiny. Upon her death Dido, like her predecessor in Virgil, charges a later generation of Carthaginians to take revenge by war, as the poet says when describing the representations (406–25). Although the union of the lovers is called a “pact” (416: *foedera*), in Silius Aeneas is not presented as being guilty of breaking it, rather as following the fates. All the same, Dido is shown feeling betrayed and therefore, according to the description of the pictures on the shield, entrusting revenge to future generations of her countrymen. Within the description, this scene is immediately followed by the young Hannibal vowing to fight against the Aeneadae (2.426–28). Hence Carthaginian resentment going back to Aeneas’ departure from Carthage is suggested as the cause of the present war. In this respect, it would seem natural for Anna to follow Juno and support Hannibal against the Romans.

The reason why this is not a straightforward decision for Anna is explained by the excursus in book 8. As the initial stages of Dido’s encounter with Aeneas have been called to mind in connection with the shield, the narrative immediately starts with the aftermath, by means of a brief reference to Dido killing herself with Aeneas’ sword on the fatal pyre (50–53), and then turns to Anna’s fate: when Iarbas, a suitor rejected by Dido, had usurped the throne, Anna left the country and was hospitably received by Battus in Cyrene (54–60). She stayed with him for two years and then had to move on again for fear of Pygmalion, who had murdered her sister’s former husband Sychaeus (61–64).

Anna took to the sea and was eventually shipwrecked upon the coast of Laurentum (65–68). At first she was in great fear, yet she had her fears dispelled when she was courteously and hospitably received by Aeneas and his son Iulus (69–75). In contrast to Ovid’s account (*Fast.* 3.603–06), here it is not Aeneas and Achates, but Aeneas and his son Iulus who meet Anna. This serves to increase the encounter’s emotional impact, and turn it into a confrontation between families and peoples, since Iulus symbolises the continuation of Aeneas’ family and leadership.

In response to Aeneas’ enquiries about Dido’s death (76–78), Anna narrates how Dido reacted to his departure and how she died (79–103, 114–59). When told about Dido’s distress at his departure, Aeneas confirms with a solemn oath that he left Carthage and the marriage in sorrow and with a longing look, and only because of the threats and intervention of Mercury, who set him on board with his own hand (104–13). Clearly, the poet picks up on the motivation for the departure given by Virgil (*Aen.* 4.219–78) and emphasises it. All responsibility is conferred to the god, and therefore Aeneas’ departure, which caused Dido’s death, is attributed to an entity other than Aeneas.

Interestingly, the incident as a whole is narrated as a personal tragedy: there is no mention of Aeneas’ destiny, just of the god’s intervention. And Dido’s last words on the pyre as reported here do not contain a curse; instead she is concerned with the impact of her life, her journey to the underworld and a possible reunion with her first husband. With reference to the Virgilian Dido’s interpretation of their relationship (*Aen.* 4.171–72), the union between Dido and Aeneas is consistently defined as a marriage: Aeneas talks of *thalamus* (109), and Dido is reported to have called herself *Aeneae coniunx*, *Veneris nurus* (“the wife of Aeneas, the daughter-in-law of Venus”, 143, trans. Duff, 1934).

This definition makes their separation and the ensuing wars all the more serious, since they thereby turn into a kind of fraternal conflict. However, the aspects of revenge and of the emergence of future wars are completely omitted, which leads to a contradiction with the description of Dido’s death on Hannibal’s shield. Yet the narrator accounts for the shift of focus: the story is now told by Dido’s sister Anna while seeking asylum from Aeneas and hence using an appropriately non-aggressive style (80).

After Aeneas has heard Anna’s story, he is touched and entertains kindly feelings towards her; for her part, she has put away her concerns and no longer seems a stranger (160–64). So it looks as if there could be a reconciliation between the two parties. But during the night her sister Dido appears to Anna and tells her that there can never

be lasting peace between Romans and Carthaginians, that Anna should beware of the snares of Aeneas' wife Lavinia and go to the nymphs in the river, so that her deity may be forever honoured in Italy (164–84).

In Ovid's version Lavinia is indeed plotting against Anna out of jealousy (*Fast.* 3.633–38). But in Silius Lavinia has not even been mentioned up to this point; she only appears (in a later book) in the underworld, among the women important for Rome's history (13.806–10). The poet rather exploits the detail of Lavinia's jealousy insinuated by Dido to give the latter's intervention a more personal dimension and to indicate her deep disappointment with Aeneas. This complex set-up indicates that there existed the possibility of reconciliation between the survivors, but that its realisation was prevented by Dido's fear and distrust of the Trojans on the basis of her previous experiences.

Yet in Dido's speech there is again no mention of revenge or of an order to fight the Romans. It is rather an instruction to Anna to care for her own safety because of the danger caused by Aeneas' men. Therefore there is no contradiction with Dido's persona as presented in the immediately preceding narrative of her death. Although Silius' Dido differs from Ovid's (*Fasti* 3.639–42) in recalling the ancient resentment, she does not spur Anna on to take revenge. Instead Dido is concerned for Anna's welfare, in line with her belief that there will never be lasting peace between the two peoples. Dido's advice to Anna is given in neutral, geographical terms, so that there is no direct mention of the consequence that in future Anna will be honoured by enemies of the Carthaginians.

Anna's terrified reaction to this dream closes the Dido inset and marks the shift back to the action concerning Anna herself. Anna follows Dido's orders. In the morning Aeneas' men notice that she has vanished, and they realise eventually that she has become a river nymph. She was seen among the Naiads and addressed the Trojans with friendly speech. Ever since, the poet says, she has had a regular festival and has been worshipped as divine throughout Italy (185–201). That the Trojans / Romans thus honour a deity who is Carthaginian in origin does not seem unnatural in view of the preceding narrative, since Anna and Aeneas were about to be reconciled with each other.

When Silius has brought the entire excursus to an end with this aetiological explanation (200–01), he returns, without further authorial intervention or explicit transition, to the narrative present and describes how Anna is obedient to Juno and admonishes Hannibal (202–41). In her speech to Hannibal (210–25), he has Anna allude to her ambiguous nature, that had already surfaced in her initial conversation with Juno (30–31, 41–43): although Anna is honoured in Italy as an immortal goddess,

she traces her descent back to the same ancestor as Hannibal (220–21). Consequently, Hannibal accepts Anna as an indigenous goddess (227–28, 239).

Thus Juno's intervention has the expected result: Hannibal is encouraged by Anna's appearance, voices his veneration and promises, in the event of a successful battle, to place an image of her in a marble temple on the acropolis of Carthage, together with an image of Dido (226–31). If Hannibal were to do this, it would be a clear visualisation of the fact that Anna is a figure worshipped by both peoples. This demonstrates that the two nations could have things in common, while it is also made clear that Hannibal immediately exploits the goddess for his own purposes.

Although, at Juno's instigation, Anna supports Hannibal in this scene, it is indicated that her potential impact transgresses national boundaries and that due to her "dual citizenship" she might be able to mediate between different nations. This is particularly akin to Anna's characterisation in both Virgil and Ovid (and to her primary function in Silius), where she is asked to negotiate between individuals. But preceding events, epitomised in Dido's reaction to Aeneas' departure, loom large and prevent more positive developments: owing to the resentment instilled in Dido's descendants and the continuing powerful influence of the revengeful goddess Juno, reconciliation does not come to pass, which demonstrates the force of the traditional conflict. Hence, just before the battle of Cannae, the Anna Perenna episode illustrates that in the given circumstances there is no way around deadly battles between Romans and Carthaginians, since the recollection of Aeneas' treatment of Dido continues to make the Carthaginians oppose the Romans.

Tellingly, Silius chose to go back into the past and to include in his historical epic events from the early, "mythical" history of Rome and their divine motivation. Even though Virgil already connects the story of the Trojan War and its aftermath with the course of Roman history in the *Aeneid*, the immediate connection between the Trojan stories and the Second Punic War in Silius seems noteworthy. Indeed, he refers the origin of this war back to the divinely instigated events at the time of the Trojan War, which removes any guilt for the Romans as descendants of Aeneas. For although Aeneas' behaviour towards Dido is presented as the ultimate cause of the Carthaginians' relentless hatred against the Romans, he is freed from personal guilt for the situation he happened to be in. The causal connection between the two wars is further highlighted by a continuous emphasis on the fact that the Romans are actually Trojans and that Rome is "another", a "new Troy".

By taking up elements from preceding literary works Silius Italicus sketches a portrait of the causes of the Second Punic War that combines literary traditions and places new emphases, which can be understood as being immediately relevant to the writer's present. For on the one hand the poet presents a predetermined continuous process since the Trojan War, and on the other hand he points to human initiatives that could potentially lead to different developments. Against the background of confirmed hegemony of Rome, this opens up a perspective for Rome's future, oscillating between being tested and suffering as ordained by Jupiter and a potential for reconciliation and peace on the basis of human activities. Silius has thus given the Dido story a new function and interpretation. The portrait of a betrayed lover becomes less prominent, while what is highlighted is the ultimate cause for a relationship between two peoples in history. At the same time Dido's personal story is made to open up a potential for reconciliation, exemplified by the enhanced role of her sister Anna.

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The topic of the Trojan War remained a popular theme in late-antique and medieval literature. In those periods information about it was not only gained from classical literary treatments, along with their extensive commentary tradition, but also from widely disseminated Latin versions of the alleged eyewitness accounts of the late-antique prose writers Dictys Cretensis and Dares Phrygius. Stories connected with the Trojan War were then presented in a number of medieval epics and romances, some of which focused on the episode of Dido and Aeneas, such as the French *Roman d'Eneas* in the middle of the 12th century and the German *Eneas* by Heinrich von Veldeke in the late 12th century. While the German poet used the French version as a primary source and also had access to other descriptions of the Trojan War, it is obvious that he was also directly influenced by Virgil, who was a school author at the time and would be familiar to well-educated literary people, as well as by Ovid.¹⁶

Veldeke takes care to present his poem, a narrative of about 13,500 lines, as based on authoritative sources: he refers to "the famous Vergil" in the introduction (18.11/41), and he uses phrases such as "Vergil tells us", "the books reliably tell us", "so the poem

¹⁶ On Veldeke see e.g. Classen (2006), with further references. For the Middle High German text and a translation into modern German see Fromm (1992); for an English translation see Fisher (1992; his translation is here used throughout). On the numbering see Fisher (1992) v–vi: "I have used the system of consecutive verse numbering for Veldeke's text, rather than numbering by manuscript page and verse as in the edition of the work by Ettmüller. In the Translation, however, I have included both systems at the head of each page, for easier orientation". For the same reason both sets of numbers are given here.

tells us” or “we are told” for authority on other occasions (cf. 21.25/165; 21.37/177; 23.33/253; 34.24/686).¹⁷ At the same time he obviously feels free to modify his sources and also highlight his procedure, for example when he shortens the description of Carthage and says: “Much of what the good Vergil says of it in his books we can pass over, and reduce the story considerably, where it is proper to do so” (26.17–21/357–61).¹⁸

In Veldeke, Aeneas is still the Trojan refugee who is received in friendly fashion by Dido, queen of Carthage. The developing love relationship, however, is described and assessed in a way different from Virgil. While pagan gods retain a role and function in the plot, they become less important, and the portrayal of the phenomenon of love affecting individuals is heavily influenced by its concept and presentation in Ovid’s poetry. For instance, when Aeneas arrives at Dido’s court, it is still Venus and Cupid who cause Dido to fall passionately in love with Aeneas (35.37–36.5/739–47). Yet after the welcome banquet and Aeneas’ tale of Troy, Veldeke considerably extends the description of Dido’s reaction to this first meeting and narrates in detail how she spends the ensuing night, in particular how she is tormented by love, characterised like a disease, as in Ovid’s love poetry. Dido is determined to gain Aeneas’ affection, but, as the narrator says, Aeneas “had set his heart and his resolve on the fact that he would not stay there, whatever the price, nor turn his back on the glory he had been sent to win in the land of Italy” (57.36–58.2/1622–28).

However, when Dido and Aeneas are forced to spend time together during the tempest that occurs during the hunt, “he begged her to yield to him what she herself desired” (63.18–20/1846–48), and, despite her protests, “he did with her what he wanted, and gallantly received her favour” (63.25–27/1853–55). Afterwards Dido is both happy about her love being requited and disappointed because “she had given in to him so readily, and upon so little entreaty” (64.14–16/1882–84). By having Dido reflect on the event, the narrative indicates the problematic nature of the relationship.

At any rate these developments allow Dido to go public: “When the news spread that Lady Dido had taken the step of having Eneas as her lover, she

¹⁷ See also: “Mighty Carthage was beset with a hundred towers; if anyone is surprised at this and wishes to make enquiries, let him consult the books which are called the *Aeneid*, and he may be fully satisfied as to the truth as it is written in them” (26.32–40/376–82).

¹⁸ On forms of adaptation of Virgil’s *Aeneid* in the Middle Ages, influenced also by Ovid and later texts, see Kern (1996).

became his bride officially and held a great celebration. It was announced far and wide throughout the country, for she wanted thereby to gloss over, as she rightly should, the shame of what she had done in the forest. Now she became open and unconcerned, and did his bidding in public and private” (64.38–65.12/1906–18). Dido initiates all activities to legitimise the relationship, which is described according to the conventions of the time, although this endeavour is doomed to be unsuccessful.

When the gods order Aeneas to leave, Dido is distressed just as her literary predecessors. Soon afterwards, as she is about to take her own life, she is characterised as being completely out of her mind:

“She said bitterly, ‘Alas, Lord Eneas, how mighty I was when I first met you and saw you in this country. I must pay dearly for it. I will not speak ill of you, for you are without blame, you were fond enough of me, but I loved you beyond measure. Now you have left me to grieve in my house. Your mother Venus and brother Cupid have left me very unhappy; they took away my heart, so that all my senses cannot avail me. Alas, cruel Love, how you have overwhelmed me! I cannot put in words the feelings I have. Alas for honour and wealth, happiness and wisdom, power and influence – of all this I had my share. It is a terrible fate that it should end this way for me, to my misfortune and to my great loss. I have been cruelly overburdened. My distress is so fierce that I cannot walk or stand, lie or sit. I am dying of heat and yet am tortured with cold. I know not what is the cause of it. I am ravaged with poison, and do not want to go on living this way’. Then mighty Dido continued in pitiful tone, ‘How sorry is my plight! Alas that it should ever turn out thus, that I should ever be so aflame within. Alas for this love, it is monstrous, burning me so cruelly with its fire. I will be spoken of in wonderment ever more. I must pierce the heart that has deceived me. Why did I not kill myself at the beginning, when I first began to suffer, and so stupidly took the stranger who had not come here on my account? If I had slain myself earlier I would not need to lament for myself, nor would any of my friends, the cost to myself would not have included the shame. But now my humiliation is spread far and wide, and the great cost must become public knowledge, for I do not want to stay alive’. When she had finished speaking, she stabbed herself through the heart. Although she was a wise woman she had completely lost her reason. To have thus chosen death was a mark of madness, it was false love which drove her to it. With the stab she sprang and fell into the flames”.

(76.11–78.7/2355–433)

This long quotation illustrates the destructive effects of love on a woman like Dido, who is otherwise “wise” and powerful. This forms the main focus of the narrative: Dido is unable to resist the forces of love and to overcome having been abandoned. Subsequently, it is said that “the Devil had urged the lady to kill herself” (80.28–29/2534–35). This remark indicates criticism of Dido’s suicide, but not necessarily of her love and the consequences. In the underworld

Aeneas finds Dido among “those who had died of love” (99.29/3295), and the narrator introduces her as “the mighty Lady Dido, who had killed herself so wretchedly for love of him” (99.31–33/3297–99), which again highlights how she is overcome by the powers of love and is unable to react rationally and as expected.

By contrast, Lavinia’s love for Aeneas develops in a more positive fashion. Even though it is again Venus and Cupid who make a noble woman fall in love and suffer from this condition, this love affair ultimately leads to a proper marriage with the appropriate procedure duly observed. It is emphasised at various points that care is taken that both parties are ready and prepared, there is mutual consent and they proceed according to convention. This is connected to an ideal of mutual courtly love, which follows social and literary models other than those of Virgil’s *Aeneid*.¹⁹ Thus the theme of love is developed throughout the work; against this background the love between Dido and Aeneas becomes a paradigmatic example of an unbalanced love relationship with Aeneas not really emotionally engaged.

Overall Veldeke has kept the basic structure and the main elements of Virgil’s narrative, but adapted the narrative style and modified the emphases given to the various adventures of the protagonists. In line with such modifications, the tale of Dido and Aeneas, which covers roughly the first fifth of the work (since the Aeneas story is narrated in chronological sequence), is presented as an instance of a particular type of love and its consequences; this is set against a significantly enlarged love affair between Aeneas and Lavinia, which, due to the different circumstances, has a more positive outcome. While the aspect of Aeneas fulfilling a role in Roman history is toned down, in both cases the love relationships between members of ruling families still have a political dimension.²⁰

* * *

Even though Veldeke’s presentation of the story is different from Virgil’s *Aeneid*, it is, like Virgil’s poem, a long narrative in verse that covers the entire story of Aeneas. In the early modern period, it was the dramatic potential of the tale of Dido and Aeneas, inherent in the plot and indicated by the structure of *Aen.* 4, that became significant.

¹⁹ On the different ways in which Aeneas’ relationship to the two women is portrayed in Veldeke and his sources see also Mecklenburg (2001) 178–85; Mühlherr (2007).

²⁰ On the tension between love and the position of ruler and the implications for the characters’ “guilt” see Kartschoke (1983).

However, like the narrating of the story as a letter written by Dido (as in Ovid), its transformation into a drama in which Dido takes centre stage reduces the importance of Aeneas as the destined founder of a “second Troy” and puts more emphasis on Dido and her love relationship.

A famous one among the sixteenth-century dramas on Dido is the piece *Dido, Queen of Carthage*. It was Christopher Marlowe’s (1564–93) first tragedy, printed in 1594, which he is thought to have written when he was still a student at Cambridge, although there are possible contributions by Thomas Nashe (1567–1601). Marlowe’s knowledge of classical literature is obvious from the fact that he translated Ovid’s *Amores* and the first book of Lucan’s *Pharsalia*. His debt to Virgil is demonstrated within the play itself by the facts that he has inserted key lines in the original Latin at particularly important or emotional points, and that he does not seem to have consulted any published translations of Virgil available at the time. Besides, Marlowe was familiar with Ovid’s Dido in the *Heroides*, medieval versions of the Dido story such as Lydgate’s *Troy Book* (1412–20) and perhaps previous dramatisations.²¹

Although Marlowe focuses on the relationship between the sexes, his story still has a broader framework, since the play starts with a divine scene in which Jupiter sets out the future of Rome, as Virgil’s Jupiter does in *Aen.* 1. Marlowe has Jupiter confirm to Venus that Aeneas will reach Italy and lay the foundations for a new city that will make Troy eternal, but this outlook on the future is not directly connected with Dido’s role and fate. The fortune of Rome only comes into focus again when Dido dies with the Virgilian curse (*Aen.* 4.628–29) on her lips in the final scene (V.1). Significantly, this curse is among the few key lines that are given in the Latin original. In the English speech leading up to it Dido wishes that Aeneas’ men, even after reaching Italy, will still be troubled, and that a conqueror will rise from her ashes “that may revenge this treason to a Queene, / By plowing up his Countries with the Sword” (V.1, 307–08).²² This must be a direct reference to Hannibal and the Punic Wars. Thus there is a clear link between the two events, just as in Silius Italicus, while of course the story of Hannibal is not part of Marlowe’s drama and Hannibal is not even mentioned by name.

²¹ For a discussion of the play’s background and sources (with further references) see Vivien & Tydeman (1994) 17–24, for its relationship to Virgil and Ovid see, most recently, Buckley (2011). For contemporary versions of the major source texts see Vivien & Tydeman (1994) 25–66. On the possible contemporary relevance of the piece see Purkiss (1998); on the presentation of Dido see also Mecklenburg (2001) 184–89.

²² For the text see Bowers (1981).

Marlowe refers the start of the love relationship between Dido and Aeneas back to an intervention by Venus after Aeneas has already been hospitably received by Dido and has told the story of the fall of Troy. Venus orders Cupid (as Ascanius) to make Dido fall in love, as in Virgil's *Aen.* 1. Her motivation, however, is that she wants Dido to get the ships of the shipwrecked Aeneas repaired and feed his men. The purpose, moreover, contains a surprising alternative: "and he [*i.e.* Aeneas] at last depart to *Italy* / Or else in *Carthage* make his kingly throne" (II.1, 330–31). This notion becomes relevant for the continuation of the plot, since Venus manages to prevent Juno from killing Ascanius (and thus destroying the hope of a new Troy) with the expectation of keeping Aeneas in Carthage through love for Dido (III.2).

Throughout, Ascanius plays an important role. Already at his first encounter with Dido he spontaneously says in a childlike way: "Madame, you shall be my mother" (II.1, 96). Aeneas on the other hand seems rather indecisive; he even allows himself to be persuaded by Dido initially to ignore the divine command to move on, plans to build a "statelier *Troy*" called *Anchisæon* in Dido's country (V.1, 1–23), and then, after having been admonished by Jupiter's messenger Mercury for a second time, tries to depart without seeing her. When he finally talks to Dido, it is he who leaves during the conversation. In this conversation the key ideas are again given as famous verses of the original Latin. Dido says: "*Si bene quid de te merui, fuit aut tibi quidquam / Dulce meum, miserere domus labentis: et istam / Oro, si quis adhuc precibus locus, exue mentem* [*Aen.* 4.317–19]". And Aeneas answers: "*Desine meque tuis incendere teque querelis, / Italiam non sponte sequor* [*Aen.* 4.360–61]" (V.1, 136–140).²³

Besides, Marlowe complicates the story by introducing additional, mainly entertaining scenes, in the typical fashion of Elizabethan plays. The divine scene at the opening of the play has a lighter tone as it shows Jupiter with Ganymed (I.1), and later on the poet has Dido's aged nurse, like her mistress, struck by Cupid (IV.5). Iarbas acquires greater importance as a jealous rival of Aeneas, being involved in a number of scenes. His frustration with Aeneas and his attempts to get rid of him result in his suicide; and as Marlowe represents Dido's sister Anna as in love with Iarbas, she kills herself too. So the play ends with three on-stage deaths and not just the one of Dido herself (V.1).

²³ "If ever I deserved well of you, or if anything of mine has been sweet in they sight, pity a falling house, and if yet there be any room for prayers, put away, I pray, this purpose". – "Cease to inflame yourself and me with your complaints. It is not by my wish that I make for Italy!"

Thus in Marlowe the historical dimension, by which the story of Dido is linked to the fate of Rome, is kept, but by the introduction of further emotional elements, dramatic effects and entertaining additions, the love affair between Dido and Aeneas loses some of its significance as a unique and important event. At the same time Marlowe obviously was able to assume that a substantial part of his audience would be familiar with Virgil and recognize his drama's complex relationship to the Latin model.

* * *

An opportunity to exploit the dramatic potential of the subject matter further by means of music was offered by the developing genre of opera. A large number of musical dramas on this story were composed from the 17th to the 19th centuries.²⁴ One of the best known today is perhaps *Dido and Aeneas*. The music to this opera was provided by Henry Purcell (1659–95); the libretto was written by Nahum Tate (1652–1715), who had previously composed a play with a similar plot, entitled *Brutus of Alba: or, The Enchanted Lovers* (1678). *Dido and Aeneas* was first performed in the early 1680s: there are records of a performance in 1689, which, however, does not seem to have been the first one.²⁵

This opera (in a prologue and three acts, with a playing time of about one hour) opens with a divine prologue asserting the power of love and a celebration of spring welcoming Venus. The first act shows Dido, who is already burning with love for the shipwrecked Aeneas, but hesitates to reveal it, although her confidant Belinda encourages her and Aeneas asks for her love. The second act introduces decisive developments: it is not the gods, but a sorceress and enchantresses who meet in a cave and come up with a plan to cause misfortune to Dido (without any obvious reason) by first causing a storm during the hunt and then encouraging Aeneas to move on. They proceed to provoke a tempest that forces Dido and Aeneas and their retinue to break off the hunt in the woods. Dido and her people return to the city, while the spirit of the sorceress in the likeness of the divine messenger Mercury reminds Aeneas of his task. He obeys and decides to leave immediately, although he feels ill at ease, since the queen had just given over her heart to him and they had enjoyed a night together. In the third act, the

²⁴ E.g. Busenello / Cavalli, *Didone* (1641); Tate / Purcell, *Dido and Aeneas* (1689); Hinsch / Graupner, *Dido, Königin von Carthago* (1707); Metastasio / Sarro, *Didone abbandonata* (1724); Metastasio / Vinci, *Didone abbandonata* (1726); Marmontel / Piccinni, *Didon* (1783); Hoare (after Metastasio) / Storace, *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1792); Kellgren / Kraus, *Aeneas i Cartago* (1799); Berlioz, *Les Troyens (à Carthage)* (1863). On some of these works see Koch (1990).

²⁵ For the text as well as notes on the play's date and background see Cholij (2000); text also included in Paulsen (2000).

sorceress rejoices at the success of the plan, while Aeneas takes leave from the distraught Dido. In this final encounter, Dido is deeply hurt because in her eyes Aeneas had shown himself to be disloyal and not trustworthy. Therefore she sends him away as he is about to revise his decision, because she has lost faith in him. The opera closes with Dido about to die after having been abandoned by Aeneas.

This version contains most of the key elements that are known from Virgil's narrative, although the plot has been condensed significantly: all characters not strictly necessary for the story have been eliminated, speeches have been reduced and important facts are presented elliptically or given a new function. In form the tale has been turned into a kind of tragedy, where human beings are exposed to destructive forces working on them, and a psychological love story, where a noble lady devotes herself to love and is then abandoned and therefore feels shunned and dishonoured. Besides, the presentation has been adapted: the high amount of dance and choral songs is in line with the taste of the time.

But there may be more to it. It has been suggested that the piece could have political undertones. Some critics have connected it with the Glorious Revolution in 1688 and the coronation of Prince William and Princess Mary on 11 April 1689, and some have thought that the libretto makes use of a symbolic reading popular during the English-Dutch War in 1672, according to which Carthage represents Amsterdam and Rome Britain. Then the story could be applied to the present time and be read as a warning to William not to neglect his kingdom and his wife. Others again have said that the reduction and changes to the story (causing some ambiguities) are the result of efforts to obscure parallels between the English monarch and queen Dido that could have negative implications. Connections to James II have also been suggested.²⁶

At any rate, although it seems that in the history of reception the love element of the story (highlighted in the prologue to this version) has become more dominant, it is still a love affair between the leaders of two peoples with the associated political dimension, and this makes it possible to connect the mythical story with contemporary monarchs.

* * *

At the end of this brief look at depictions of the figure of Dido from Virgil's epic to opera in seventeenth-century England, the reappearance of this character in

²⁶ For a discussion of possible political allegories see Price (1984) 229–34; for a critical review of such interpretations see Harris (1987) 17–20; for overviews of debated issues and the relationship to Virgil see Koch (1990) 33–38; Burden (1998); Paulsen (2000) 263–65.

such diverse contexts shows the powerful impression of Virgil's *Aeneid*, as well as its lasting relevance and potential for adaptation. In later versions, the two aspects inherent in Virgil's tale, Dido's unhappy love affair and her curse as the "historical" basis for the conflict between Rome and Carthage, are taken up, with one of them typically more dominant in the various versions, while both issues are adapted to the intentions and contemporary circumstances of the respective poets. So the story of Dido may be turned into a description of the plights of an elegiac lover, into a medieval paradigm of the destructive forces of vehement love, or into a more modern psychological and also magical story where a sorceress replaces the ancient gods. The political aspect can serve for a consideration of the difficult relationship between two countries represented by Carthage and Rome.

Even without going into all the details of the complex meanings of each version discussed here, it is obvious that Virgil's narrative of Aeneas and Dido in the *Aeneid* has provided a rich and fruitful basis for a long line of multi-faceted enjoyable stories and important works of literature.

To illustrate the wide variety of possible intertextual relationships and interpretations originating from Virgil's *Aeneid*, this discussion concludes with a piece by the Elizabethan poet Thomas Campion (1567–1620), which he defines as 'A Ballad' (part of *The Ayres that were sung and played at Brougham Castle in Westmerland, in the Kings Entertainment*, printed 1618). Here the poet manages to tell the entire story of Dido and Aeneas in three stanzas of ten short lines each and to infer from it a "moral" for contemporary men:²⁷

Dido was the *Carthage* Queene
 And lou'd the *Troian* Knight
 That wandring many coasts had seene
 And many a dreadfull fight:
 As they on hunting road, a shower
 Drave them in a louing hower
 Downe to a darksome caue
 Where *Aeneas* with his charmes
 Lockt Queene *Dido* in his armes
 And had what he could haue.

²⁷ For the text see Vivian (1909) 231–32.

Dido Hymens Rites forgot,

Her loue was wing'd with haste,

Her honour shee considered not

But in her breast him plac't.

And when her loue was new begunne

Ioue sent downe his winged Sonne

To fright *Æneas* sleepe;

Bad him by the breake of day

From Queene *Dido* steale away:

Which made her waile and weepe.

Dido wept, but what of this?

The Gods would haue it so:

Æneas nothing did amisse,

For hee was forc't to goe.

Learne, Lordings, then, no faith to keepe

With your Loues, but let them weepe:

'Tis folly to be true:

Let this Story serue your turne,

And let twenty *Didoes* burne

So you get daily new.

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